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Foreign Classics for English Readers

EDITED BY

MRS OLIPHANT

MOLIÈRE

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EDITED BY MRS OLIPHANT.

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MOLIÈRE

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BY

MRS OLIPHANT

AND

F. TARVER, M.A.

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INTRODUCTION.

Among the many great names which make French literature illustrious, there is scarcely one which is so universally acknowledged and of such national importance as that of Molière. The graver poets, of whose works Frenchmen are proud, and whose names stand first on the register of fame, do not wake the same warmth of interest and sympathy which make Molière always living, always popular, the familiar friend as well as the immortal writer—dear to his countrymen, with no solemnity of classical fame alone, but with the warmth almost of personal contact. We are naturally jealous of placing any but the greatest on the same elevation with Shakespeare, and even the most warm enthusiast in France would scarcely venture to claim for her great comedian a place by the side of the sovran poet, to whom all regions of imagination and all passions of mankind were open. But yet, with all the limitations that must be allowed on our side, Molière makes the nearest approach to the position of Shakespeare which any Frenchman has made. Though

he has never touched those tragic chords which move our deepest emotions, or at least only with a momentary finger, with a breath, as in the sadness of the 'Misanthrope;' though he has usually confined himself to those subjects which elicit laughter—laughter pure and simple, without any admixture of pain or pity,—yet there is something of universality in his humour—a breadth and manly vigour, a genuine mirth and enjoyment without bitterness, which are of kin to the largeness of Shakespeare. No personal rancour, no individual enmity, narrows or intensifies his satire. He himself, the reader feels, would never have been less courteous to any fine lady of the Hotel-Rambouillet because of the 'Femmes Savantes,' or treated any doctor with less personal respect because of the hundred follies of old-fashioned medicine of which he made honest fun, holding both his sides, and half grateful to the victim who gave him so much amusement. This quality of breadth and largeness, which we cannot characterise otherwise than as a moral quality, not only takes the sting out of contemporary satire, but raises it above the danger of anachronism. Spite fixes upon personal details, and more or less neutralises its own venom by so doing; but the genius of mirth is never out of date, and its unvenomed laughter lasts as long as human nature continues to be laughable, and goes on disporting itself with all the cranks and oddities of nature. There are no such pedants nowadays as M. Jourdain's master in philosophy, neither would the most accomplished dancing-master maintain the argument which puzzled that simple citizen between the excellence of his own craft and that of his brother professor.

"Philosophy is something, but dancing, sir, dancing!" Perhaps even in the days of Louis XIV. this parallel would scarcely have been risked in words. Yet we still see every day before us folly enough in the guise of wisdom to make the elocutionist a possibility, and masters of the frivolous arts sufficiently self-important to suggest the same triumphant contrast. Thus genius, keeping on the broad lines of human nature, is never out of date.

It is this which secures for Molière an unexhausted and inexhaustible fame. He is never paltry, never spiteful, never small: his laughter, if it has not the roll and rush of Shakespearian mirth, is frank and honest and irresistible. He is no avenger of personal feuds, no executioner of individual malice. At his heaviest blow he means no harm, and has no desire to crush or to wound. He sees what is ludicrous with a glance which is penetrating and quick as lightning, and cuts through and through the veils of false meaning—but yet beholds his fellow-creature behind, and does all in fun, and nought in anger. At the same time his humour is not that which we have recently accustomed ourselves to dignify with that name,—the humour of Sterne or Thackeray—the tender ridicule which is never far from tears, and which may be the very utterance of love itself.

Several of the plays of Molière have been worked more or less into English, according to the system of adaptation with which we are all so familiar; but these are mostly antiquated and fallen out of knowledge. And there has been at least one full translation into

English, recently published, which is quite faithful to the text, without giving the least idea of the unfailing sparkle and brilliant wit of the original. In order to avoid a downfall of the same kind, the actual quotations we have made are but few in number. Character and meaning may be translatable, but the rapid grace of Molière's dialogue it is scarcely possible to reproduce.

MOLIÈRE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS EARLY LIFE.

JEAN BAPTISTE POQUELIN, afterwards called Molière, was the son of a respectable *bourgeois* family in Paris, of the class which he has so often illustrated, and was born in the beginning of the year 1622 in the house in the Rue St Honoré where his father carried on his business—the *Maison des Cygnes*,[1] or sign of the Swans, as we should call it, according to the old fashion prevalent both in England and France. He was the first child of a young couple, wealthy for their class, and in a good position, upholsterers, and holding the appointment which respectable tradesmen still covet, of upholsterers to the king, which proves that the father stood well in his trade. Marie Cressé, the mother, belonged to a family following the same occupation, though some light of superior birth seems to have wavered over her through the much-prized particle *de* with which her father signed. What

[1] Sometimes also called *Maison des Singes*.

was more to the purpose, however, was that she must have been in her own person tolerably well endowed, as her son is spoken of in his father's lifetime as able to live honourably upon his own means without pursuing any occupation—a fortune which must evidently have come from his mother, who died when he was but ten years old. In the many guesses at his youthful life which have been put forth as biography, an imaginary picture is set before us of a stupid and ignorant shopkeeper troubled with the early genius of a boy whom he did not know how to manage, whose young imagination had been set on fire by the sight of a play to which his grandfather had taken him as a child, and who, by tears and prayers, forced his father to accord him such an education as no young upholsterer ever had before. Later and more cautious historians, however, guided by careful investigations into fact, have entirely disproved this romance, and made it evident that the young Poquelin's education was in no way beyond the natural and legitimate hopes of a wealthy citizen's son, to whom, at least, the learned professions were open, if not the honours of the camp and court. He went through his humanities in the Collège de Clermont, one of the most celebrated schools of the day, which was then directed by the Jesuits, and contained among its pupils "children of the greatest houses." Here, it is believed, he was the schoolfellow of the Prince Armand de Conti, the brother of the great Condé (who, however, was a number of years younger than Molière), and of other men who attained some celebrity, though of none whose fame approached his own. Here he also studied philosophy under the celebrated Gassendi, proceeding, in the

natural course of events, to *faire son droit*—that is, to the study of law, in preparation for the bar. How it was that, while pursuing this career, he should have been made successor to his father in the office of *valet de chambre tapissier* to the king, it is somewhat difficult to make out. Some of his biographers see in this an attempt on the part of the father to subdue his ambition, and bind the boy to a sordid trade, with an instinct sufficiently appropriate to a prudent shopkeeper and citizen. Others, on the other hand, and especially M. Bazin, whose careful examination into all that has ever been said upon the subject and all the documents on record entitles him to a respectful hearing, declares the position of the king's *valet de chambre* to have involved nothing that was humiliating for a young man of education, since a colonel in the army, or the captain of a royal ship, might fulfil the duties of the office without derogation. This however, as M. Taschereau, another able critic of the story, points out, is an argument which scarcely holds in the case of a specially designated upholsterer-valet, who must have been capable, according to law, "to keep in order the king's furniture, and even to renew it." It is probable that the truth lies somewhere between these two opinions, and that the prudent Poquelin may have been desirous of securing for his boy of genius the resource of an honest trade to fall back upon, should higher efforts fail,—trusting to the acquaintance with chairs and tables, rich draperies and fringes of gold, which he must have made in the paternal shop in early days, to carry him through the technical portion of his duties, without interfering in the meantime with his reading as a law student, or his

hopes of the advocate's robe. Perhaps the possible advantage of being thrown in the king's way, and brought under his personal notice, might also tell for something in making this appointment desirable. So far as is known, however, it was never during his youth carried the length of actual service. It is supposed by some, indeed, that the young Poquelin took his father's place in 1641, and accompanied the king on one of his expeditions in the exercise of this nondescript office—but of this there is no proof; and it would be as easy to conjecture that in this way the young knight of the carpets—the *valet-tapissier*, who was at the same time a scholar, a philosopher, and a man of genius—might have been brought in contact with the little Louis, afterwards *Le Grand Monarque*, and magnificent patron of the dramatist and his art: which would have added a picturesque incident to the story. This pretty possibility, however, is never suggested; and though fancy has been very dogmatic and positive about the early portion of the young man's career, there are no facts to support the imagination. All that is known is that Jean Baptiste Poquelin received an excellent education, and pursued his law studies to their legitimate end, having been, as some assert, actually called to the bar. According to a satirical ballad, written against him in later years when he had become famous, he even appeared once in the Palace of Justice in the capacity of an advocate; but as this is the only mention of such a fact, little faith can be put in the assertion.

When young Poquelin attained his majority, however, he reappears authentically in unquestionable records. The earliest document in his history is a formal

letter, in which he resigns back again into the hands of his father the successorship to the office of *valet de chambre tapissier*, which had been settled upon him at the age of fifteen; and at the same time makes formal acknowledgment of the receipt of a portion of the inheritance which came to him from his mother, and which was considerable enough to make him independent. This would seem to have indicated a kind of separation from the sober *bourgeois* life of the family, and from all connection with the trade, honours, and profits of the Poquelins. The good citizen's son, like him of the parable, claimed that which was due to him, and went his way upon his own career of pleasure and occupation. Molière was no prodigal; but it is likely enough that his studies and training had developed much that was inconsistent with the severe and sober life of a respectable citizen. In his many pictures of that life, where the young gallant in his ruffles and ribbons, with flowing peruke and laced coat, with his frequent love passages, intrigues, and expenses, shows against the somewhat grim background of the home, and is discussed by his old father in a cotton night-cap, and the brisk and meddling *servante*, with her broom, who is an important member of the family—there is no doubt many suggestions from his own experience. The young Cléantes and Valères, to do them justice, if always ready to deceive, are never disrespectful to constituted authority, and take the ratings bestowed upon them with great submission; but the contrast between the gilded youth and his family surroundings is very marked. Of what character the brothers were who remained behind him at the sign of the Swans, in the Rue St Honoré, and whether they had shared his

advantages of education or were content to settle down to their father's trade, there is no information. In any case, the eldest son of the family, taking with him the goods that fell to his share, here or hereabouts ceased to be Poquelin at all; and leaving at once upholstery and law behind him, stepped out dimly into the knowledge of the world, upon the rude platform of the primitive theatre of the time, under the name of Molière.

It is curious that in the case of both the great writers who occupy in France a position above all rivalry or comparison, this same unexplained change of name should have taken place, and that Molière and Voltaire should have alike separated themselves from all questions of family by a device so simple and arbitrary—not even sanctioned, as French custom permits, by any territorial connection. M. de Molière and M. de Voltaire thus conquered the *particule*, which is the sign of rank, without any difficulty or drawback. In the case of the former, however, the change was justified by the common practice of the theatrical profession which from this time he adopted, making all his past training useless, as has been the case with so many young men, and with thousands whose after-career does not justify the sacrifice, as did that of Molière. We may well conceive what feelings were in the mind of the good *bourgeois*, who probably had been virtuously conscious of making no small sacrifice when he deprived himself of the aid of his eldest son in the shop and business, in order to make a gentleman and learned functionary of the boy—when he saw him thus throw away all his advantages, and all hopes of advancement and distinction in a legitimate and dignified way, for the

noisy applauses of the theatre,—a fame which at the best would be little more than shame in the atmosphere of private respectability. The theatre at this period was no great national institution holding a high place in the life of the age, supported by royal subsidies and caressed by society, as it became in later times. The world had as yet done very little to make up for the sweeping condemnation in which the Church included, as she still does, the entire profession. The patronage of Cardinal Richelieu, and after him of Mazarin, had indeed done something to elevate in public estimation the strolling troupes of players, half tragedy-kings half buffoons, in whose performances these great men condescended to find amusement. There had even been a law made in their favour by Louis XIII., a sufficiently whimsical manifestation of paternal despotism, by which it had been enacted that the profession of comedian should henceforward be considered worthy of respect, and should not be the object of prejudice or regarded as a reproach to those who exercised it,—a law which, whatever else may be thought of it, shows at once the popular contempt for the player and the reaction against it. No proof could be more distinct on both these points. The profession of comedian, as we now understand it, seems indeed scarcely to have existed in the country where, above all others, it has been honoured and promoted in later days. Up to the time when Richelieu's patronage revived or created some taste for theatrical performances in France, the national drama had been represented only by heavy tragedies on classical subjects, or the buffooneries which are more or less indigenous in all countries, which seem to have everywhere succeeded the rude mysteries of miracle-plays—but which had de-

veloped under the special patronage of Italian humour into a characteristic and distinct branch of primitive art. M. Louis Moland, in his careful survey of Molière's life, and also in the special volume which discusses Molière's obligations to Italian comedy, has given us a very lucid description of that primitive and piquant form of dramatic representation—a form not still entirely out of use in its native country, and which is the parent of pantomime everywhere. In this early stage of its history the theatre was in possession of a group of traditionary characters, some of whom hold good their place in undying popularity—the Pantaloon, the Harlequin, and Clown of our Christmas representations, though sadly fallen now from the days when their pantomime had all the subtlety of Italian genius in a sphere peculiarly its own. This group of personages, for whose use a multitude of skeleton plays had been constructed, all of the same character —compositions of lively intrigue, practical joking, and ludicrous complication, to which the privileged wits of the stage added dialogue as suited them—were in entire possession of the popular fancy in the days when Molière was still young Poquelin, and unconsciously shaping himself towards his future course. They had developed into French, with modifications which suited the different characteristics of the two nations, changing these into Turlupin and Jodelet, Gros-René, Gros-Guillaume, and half-a-dozen more buffoons and jokers whose special talent it was to embroider at their will the sufficiently threadbare plot of ludicrous intrigue and absurd incident, with every kind of drollery, spiritual and physical, from the posturings of a mountebank to the pungent witticisms which convulsed a whole assem-

bly, and covered the victims of popular satire with confusion. The public which knew them, and knew what it had to expect from them, was easily contented with any absurd combination of incident which gave occasion for the rough horse-play and broad fun in which it delighted. Nothing could be more artless or less intellectual than the framework of story which was all they required. "Imbecile old men, young libertines, women of every kind except the good, two or three disguises, three or four surprises, combats and tumults," was all that was necessary. The stage made no pretensions to represent the world, or simulate the habits and customs of contemporary society; and comedy as now understood was an unknown art.

On the other hand, the tragedy of the time was solemn enough to satisfy all requirements. In the region of the classical and heroic, ordinary human sentiments were almost as much out of place as they were in the pantomimic sphere of riot and folly. Between Electra, Hecuba, Darius, Alexander: and Turlupin, Jodelet, Gaultier Garguille, and Gros-René, the gap was immense. No pretence of holding a mirror up to nature could be possible on either hand. Nevertheless, those attractions which always have surrounded the life of the theatre seem to have existed in full force. From the days of Richelieu two theatres appear to have been established in Paris: one in the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where tragedy held sway; the other in the Marais, afterwards removed to a hall in what was called the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon, in which, in Molière's early days, a troupe of Italians gave representations three times a-week. At the time when he had reached his twenty-

first year, and was about, to the horror of all his friends, to throw aside his own better prospects and embark in this wild career, the rising tide of popular interest had come, we are told by M. Petitot, one of the many biographers of the great dramatist, to such a height that many lesser representations were given in various parts of Paris, half amateur, half professional—"a kind of mania, often dangerous, in a moral point of view, to which the youth of the time gave itself up with enthusiasm." This statement would seem to be justified by (if indeed it is not founded upon) the manner in which Molière adopted his new profession. No doubt he too was touched more or less by the sentiments which moved his father to remonstrance and all his friends to lamentations over his folly. He was determined to be an actor; but he was a man of education laureated and distinguished, a graduate, an advocate: and when he threw himself into the life of the theatre he too felt that it ought not to be like a mere common actor, a vagrant Jodelet. What so likely to reform and elevate the profession as the entry into it of men of culture and breeding? "He attempted," says the first and most authentic sketch of his life,—that which was published with the first edition of his works by members of his own troupe—the most trustworthy of witnesses,—"to establish himself at Paris with several other persons of family (*enfants de famille*) who should, by his example, engage like himself in the art of comedy, under the title of the *Illustre Théâtre*." The illustrious theatre!—not a mere band of vulgar performers, with their Turlupinade and commonplace buffoonery, but a company of gentlemen, so to speak,—*fils de famille*—"clerks foredoomed their fathers' souls to cross,"

—young men of condition and prospects, heroically sacrificing themselves for their own cherished fancy and their country's good. The enterprise, taken in this point of view, was magnanimous and heroic, as much as it was imprudent and presumptuous. With their stage set up upon trestles in a racket-court, their rude benches, their primitive properties, it was a scheme of national reform as well as personal honour and glory which the young amateurs, headstrong and foolish, had taken in hand.

There are, however, several writers upon this subject who have represented Molière as moved by an altogether different motive in his adoption of the trade of comedian. M. Bazin, for example, in his close examination of all the fables and all the traditions by which Molière's memory has been traduced rather than celebrated, inclines to the opinion that the sentiment which drew him towards the stage was his admiration for Madeleine Béjart, whom a contemporary chronicler remarks upon as one of the first of existing actresses, adding that "a youth called Molière had left the benches of the Sorbonne in order to follow her" in her wandering career. There seems, however, no certainty that this was the case, the evidence, such as it is, pointing rather to the conjecture that Madeleine Béjart and her brothers, already known to the Parisian public, came to the help of the illustrious theatre when it became apparent that the quality of the players was not enough to carry them into the favour of the crowd. In this, as in so many other cases, enthusiasm and refinement proved unequal to the task of holding their own against professional skill and training, primitive though these still were. The young men made a fine start, chiefly, it would seem, at Molière's expense, who was at

the head of the enterprise, and probably the one among them who had money to risk in such a way. "As long as they played gratis, and no doubt at the expense of Poquelin, they were tolerated; but when they asked for some return, the whole aspect changed. They were applauded when they acted for nothing, but hissed when it cost money," says one of Molière's many biographers. "Poquelin," adds this critic, "no longer doubted that it was not easy to establish a theatre with people of distinction, and that it was necessary, in order to have a *troupe d'élite*, to have recourse to the profession." When it was no longer possible to doubt that the company of *fils de famille* was a failure, the Béjarts, it is supposed, came to the aid of the young manager, struggling against the discouragements of his empty theatre and the crowd of creditors who began to appear about him. But even with the aid of these professional players, the illustrious theatre never made good the simple brag of its title. It is strange and sadly amusing that, with an eye so clear for other men's follies, Molière himself should have fallen a victim to the very simplicity of self-deception, by thus imagining that his companions and himself were sure of surpassing the common comedians—whose manners and conversation very probably disgusted his better taste—in talent and success, as well as in refinement; and that the public would have delicacy enough to discriminate between them, and perceive the superiority of their good-breeding. Such an innocent delusion would of itself have afforded an excellent *motif* for a comedy. Not even the aid of the Béjarts, however, could set up again the illustrious theatre. It ended disastrously in several prosecutions for debt, in which Molière, probably the

only one of the company who had anything to lose, was sued by the *costumier*, candle-merchant, and other creditors of the fallen establishment, suffering even a short imprisonment before its affairs could be finally settled. The burdens thus thrown upon him were not fully cleared off, we are told, till fourteen years afterwards, when he had returned to Paris, and the tide of fortune had effectually turned. Whether his gentlemen associates, the *fils de famille* of his first ambition, deserted him after this humiliation and downfall is not very plainly apparent; but Molière does not seem for a moment to have wavered in respect to his chosen profession. The Béjarts, though they had not been able to redeem his falling fortunes, were at least faithful to him in his downfall, and with them, giving up all pretensions to any superiority, he left Paris, and set out upon his travels, no better than any other strolling player at the head of his troupe.

The family with which he had thus become connected, and from which he never separated during the rest of his life, was of sufficiently good origin to have claimed a place in the unfortunate *Illustre Théâtre* by that right alone. Their father was a lawyer, and had some claims to antiquity of race. The whole family seem to have shared that passion for the actor's art which developed into excellence in the person of one at least, the elder sister Madeleine—a woman of some beauty and many gifts—with whom Molière is supposed to have formed a connection, which the morals of the time considered almost as a matter of course. A second sister, Genevieve, and two brothers, formed part of the strolling company, when Molière plunged into the country, setting out upon

an obscure course of wanderings through which it is almost impossible to follow him. It was in 1646 that these survivors of the illustrious theatre betook themselves to the roving life which was so far from illustrious; and through the dim breadth of France—then, as always, occupied with wars and commotions, and getting lighted up now and then with the gleam of a battle —it is hopeless to attempt to trace the poor players. Apocryphal accounts of their appearance here and there, and even of a return to Paris, where they were long supposed to have played with great success before the Prince de Conti, the schoolfellow of Molière, in his hotel, at a moment when that Prince was in reality the occupant of a prison—were long accepted as real, and reported in every history of the time; but in fact the glimpses to be obtained of the great dramatist are few and far between.

In 1648 he (or some one resembling him in name, "Morlierre") is visible in the municipal records of Nantes, as "very humbly begging" from the town council, permission to play in their town; but after that, does not seem to reappear out of the mist save in 1653, seven years after his departure from Paris, when, no doubt after strollings innumerable, he is visible at Lyons, where he is reported to have performed his first comedy, the 'Étourdi.' A fashionable vagabond of the time, M. d'Assoucy, here narrates an encounter with "Molière and Messieurs les Béjarts," adding,—"As I could not make up my mind to leave such delightful acquaintances, I remained three months at Lyons." At the end of this period, "as Molière was under orders with his troupe to go to Pézénas to amuse the States of

Languedoc," D'Assoucy travelled with him by the Rhone to Avignon, and having lost his money, was supported by the generous comedians, who took him with them to their journey's end, "without being weary of seeing him at their table a whole winter." Here it is supposed by most of his biographers that Molière renewed an ancient friendship with the Prince de Conti, his (problematical) schoolfellow, and was received by him with the highest favour. Even M. Bazin agrees in this supposition, upon which, however, grave doubts are thrown by the following curious and genuine glimpse at the history of the strolling players, written evidently by a chronicler who had little perception, if any, that the troupe of Molière was more remarkable than any other troupe, and who informs us in detail how it really was that they were brought under the notice of the Prince de Conti. This young Prince, who had reconciled himself with Government, at the conclusion of the aimless fightings of the Fronde, was (they say) presiding over the meeting of the provincial Parliament, the States of Languedoc (which agrees with D'Assoucy's statement), and had established himself with his suite in the chateau of La Grange, near Pézénas, when, for the amusement of the household, it was proposed to "send for the players." How it happened that Molière's troupe was chosen is thus recounted by Daniel de Cosnac, afterwards Archbishop of Aix, but at this moment secretary to the young Prince:—

"As I had charge of the sum appropriated to the amusements of the Prince, this commission was given to me. I heard that the troop of Molière and Béjart was in Languedoc, and sent to ask them to come to La Grange. While they

were preparing to come in obedience to my orders, another troupe, that of Cormier, arrived at Pézénas. The natural impatience of M. le Prince de Conti, and the presents made by this last troupe to Madame de Calvimont, gave it the preference. When I attempted to represent to M. le Prince de Conti that I had engaged Molière according to his wishes, he replied that he had himself engaged the company of Cormier, and that it was better that I should break my word than that he should break his. However, Molière arrived, and asked that at least the expenses he had been put to for his journey should be paid to him—a claim which was perfectly just, but which I could not obtain for him, since it pleased M. le Prince de Conti to be obstinate about this trifle. This injustice had so much effect upon me, that I resolved to have a representation by Molière's troupe in the theatre at Pézénas, and to give them two thousand crowns of my own money rather than to fail of my word to them. When they were about to play in the town, M. le Prince de Conti, touched in his honour by my behaviour, and urged by Sarrasin (the favourite of the Prince de Conti and his secretary), whom I had secured on my side, consented that they should come and play once in the theatre at La Grange. In their first representation, however, they failed to please Madame de Calvimont, and consequently did not succeed with the Prince de Conti, although, in the opinion of the rest of the audience, they infinitely surpassed the troupe of Cormier, both in the talents of the actors and the magnificence of the dresses. A few days after they played again, and Sarrasin, by dint of sounding their praises, obtained the consent of M. le Prince de Conti to retain the troupe of Molière and dismiss that of Cormier. He had followed and supported them at first on my account; but afterwards, having conceived a great admiration for Du Parc, took up their cause as his own. He gained over Madame de Calvimont, and not only had the troupe of Cormier sent away, but procured an allowance for that of Molière. After this there was no thought of anything but this amusement, in which I alone took little part."

This *naïve* description of the intrigues of the little court shows how small was the advantage Molière derived from having been the schoolfellow of the Prince de Conti; and whether there was any truth whatever in the assertion that he was offered the post of secretary to the Prince after this it is impossible to tell. "The Prince de Conti recollected Molière, whom he had seen at college; he distinguished him by his special patronage," says Voltaire. M. Taschereau adds, that the Prince called the player to him on the occasion of the meeting of the States, and that Molière's gifts and those of his company attracted "new favour from his former condisciple." M. Petitot is still more confident, and assures his readers that the Prince, on hearing that Molière was in the neighbourhood, "congratulated himself on having found, in a distant province, such a certain remedy against dulness, and immediately called him to his side. An allowance was given to the troupe, and he was charged with the direction of all the amusements. . . . It seems certain that the Prince offered to the author the place of secretary; but Molière's engagements were too many, and his love for the theatre too decided, to leave him at liberty to accept such an office. The Prince, however, was in no way offended by his refusal, and continued to him his friendship and patronage."

This conflict of testimony will show how little trustworthy are the accounts of Molière's early life. M. Bazin, the closest critic of all, takes no notice whatever of the archbishop's testimony, and attempts to prove that the conjunction of Molière's troupe with the meeting of the States of Languedoc, under the presidency of the Prince de Conti, is altogether apocryphal, as is, much

more certainly, the offer of the secretaryship. The meeting seems to have been little more than accidental at the best, and if Molière afterwards managed to recall himself to the recollection of the Prince, we have no record of the fact. Two or three years later, however, "the friends of Molière advised him to change his strolling circuit to the neighbourhood of Paris," in order that "those who wished him well might have the time and means to introduce him to the Court." Probably the Prince de Conti, whom he had (without question of any previous connection) succeeded in amusing at Pézénas, was one of the "well-wishers" here referred to, and was able to recommend Molière on the best of grounds, not as an old schoolfellow, but as an excellent actor, and capable of enlivening the leisure of the king himself. Whether, however, it was by means of such an introduction, or in any other way, the certain fact is, that returning from the south in the spring of the year 1658, Molière established himself at Rouen, where he would seem to have remained till the autumn, leaving full time for the exercise of such influence as his friends, whosoever they might be, possessed; and that at the end of this period he obtained the desired permission to play before the Court—thus out of his obscurity and lowliness, out of the dimness and dulness of provincial life, reappearing in full light of day before the most magnificent patron he could have found in all Europe, the young and pleasure-loving king.

Molière's probation had lasted twelve years—a large slice out of a life—and there is no reason to suppose that during this long interval he was, either in his own eyes or those of the public, anything more than a strolling player, the head of a clever but vagabond troupe, who,

if some relics of faded gentility lingered about them still, had yet no pretensions to superior condition like those on which the *Illustre Théâtre* had plumed itself in its brief career. Yet the company which had followed his devious way through the lively southern towns, humbly begging permission to act from a country *maire*, or contending with a rival troupe for the favour of a prince, was the same which went with him to Paris, and for years represented all his finest comedies, in faithful submission to its leader, and with powers not unequal to the task. Vagabond as they had been, and peculiar as were the rules of morality or immorality existing among them, it is still clear that they possessed this faculty of loyalty, and small and great held together for good and for evil. The Béjarts, the Du Parcs, the De Bries, and many others of lesser fame, seem to have gone with him as a matter of course where he went; and no doubt the perfect knowledge he must thus have acquired of the powers of his followers influenced him in the arrangement of his comedies. Of the kind of relationships which existed between Molière and the members of his troupe it is unnecessary to speak: they must have been confusing and embarrassing in the highest degree, one would suppose; but the age was a lawless age, and a company of strolling players is perhaps not the best place in which to look for a high standard of purity at any time. It is evident that even in his youth he was a man who had constant need of sympathetic support and encouragement; and there is something so whimsical in the idea of a lover bemoaning the cruelty of one object of his affections to another, and finding in one of the women to whom he professed devotion a constant confidante in all

his other love-troubles, that the ordinary laws of right and wrong seem to be set aside in the fantastic world to which such confidences, passions, and despairs belong. And as the woman whom he had once loved, and the woman who would not accept his devotion, and the woman who was his consolation and confidante, all lived together in the closest intercourse—a society to which his wife, when her time came, was added, and which was made up by the husbands of the other ladies—it will be understood that no comedy could have been stranger, and by times no tragedy more stormy or miserable, than the life of this little community of players. It is, however, fortunately, altogether beyond our sphere to investigate these extraordinary domestic relations, if, indeed, they are quite authentic and trustworthy. No one needs to be informed that even in our own days, much more in those of Louis Quatorze, it is congenial to the vulgar imagination to think the worst of every relationship which is open to a doubt. The women of the troupe, perhaps from their closer connection with the central figure, are better known to us than the men, who, however, appear on several occasions under their own names in Molière's compositions. Du Croisy and La Grange, for example, figure—being both gentlemen by birth and fully able to sustain such parts—as the malicious lovers of the 'Précieuses Ridicules;' and Du Parc was the Gros-René of the troupe, the clown-servant of traditionary comedy. The wife of De Brie was so great in the characters called *ingénues*, that, we are told, she was recalled to the stage by universal acclamation to play these parts at the age of sixty-five, in preference to the young actress who had replaced her; while the sisters Béjart, and the wife

(according to the custom of the time called Mademoiselle) of Du Parc, were all accomplished actresses.

More interesting, however, even than this group, from which he is inseparable in history, is the progress of Molière's mind and work during this long preface to his life. We have no way of knowing the precise time at which he became weary of playing the formal tragedies drawn from classical subjects, and the buffooneries of the Italian school of comedy, which together held possession of the primitive stage. His first attempts in authorship followed the model of the latter, but were, it would appear, so much nearer the time and the life of his audience that they gained him "some little reputation," according to his own statement, in the provinces. The only ones which have been preserved to us are the 'Jalousie du Barbouillé' and the 'Médecin Volant.' The former of these consists of one act with very little variety of scene and no story,—a confused but amusing sketch of a matrimonial quarrel, in which the wife's father, and the pedant, afterwards to be so fully developed, intervene with considerable comic effect, but in the most inconclusive way, no end apparently being thought of except the "Come along to supper" with which a piece of aimless fun, calculated to make an audience laugh after the severe evening's entertainment of a classic performance, might end—the amusing suspense and disappointment of its very inconclusiveness being one of the points of the joke. The other, the 'Médecin Volant,' is less simple, and contains a slight thread of story upon which to carry the elaborate mystification, by means of which the first Sganarelle presents himself to the public; but the Sganarelle of this piece was but a kind of harlequin, and his

performance a pure piece of buffoonery from beginning to end. In neither is there anything attempted beyond simple laughter, and that not of an elevated kind. Such were the first efforts of Molière's genius. He was kept in this vein no doubt chiefly by the traditions of his art, which had as yet found out no better way; by the example of the Italians, whose performances were almost the only theatrical representations (except the tragedies) which he could ever have seen: and no doubt in some degree by the necessity which would soon impress itself upon a man of genius, hating monotony, of providing some relief after the solemnity of the heroic plays which still held the chief place on the boards. Of his other productions of this class nothing remains except the names, from which we may derive some idea at once of their quality and of the position they probably occupied as sketches for the pictures of the future. The 'Docteur Amoureux,' the 'Docteur Pédant,' 'Gros-René Écolier,' and 'La Jalousie de Gros-René' (no doubt written for the special benefit of Du Parc), 'Gorgibus dans le sac,' 'La Fagotier,' 'Le Grand Benêt de fils aussi sot que son père,' 'La Casaque.' The 'Fagotier' was no doubt a foreshadowing of the immortal woodcutter who was made into a doctor in spite of himself, as 'Gorgibus dans le sac' must have been a study for the broad fun of the scene which forms part of the 'Fourberies de Scapin.' All these were, no doubt, very laughable productions—"amusing trifles which had gained him some reputation"—full of lively fun, trickery, and clever deception; but works which, in reality, scarcely broke the surface of his own rich territory,—imitations almost servile of a foreign art not altogether harmonious with the

scarcely developed but yet strongly individual characteristics of the French drama. That drama has always been, as Moland says, like French wit in general, "much disposed to talk,"—a faculty not shared by the early Italian school, which abounded in action, and possessed a special gift of expressive pantomime. The beatings administered "in the sack" and out of it—practical joking which seems to have delighted the simple audience—the leaping out of windows, the burlesque changes of dress, and all the lively horse-play which appealed rather to the eye than the ear, come directly from this source. All through his career Molière was fond of applying the stick to his victims, probably finding it an easy way of procuring the laughter of the spectator; and of this class seem to have been, without exception, the first compositions with which he and his strollers amused their provincial audience.

There came a moment, however, when his genius burst these bonds. Possibly without any flourish of trumpets, or anything to prove to the calm spectators that the event was of importance, this sudden dawn took place. It was at Lyons, in the year 1653, five years before the return to Paris, that 'L'Étourdi,' the first of the immortal succession of comedies which was to make Molière's name illustrious, came into being. It was received with great favour by the audiences at Lyons, and repeated when the strollers, as has been recorded, went on to Pézénas to contend for the honour of appearing before the Prince de Conti. The 'Étourdi' may not be a play to which we can look back with the highest admiration now, but a glance at its predecessors will show the reader how enormous a step had been taken

in it. It was the real entrance of a new monarch and a new art upon the rude-conventional stage. If the work itself is still conventional and unreal, and far removed from that lively representation of the manners and follies of the time which we find when Molière has discovered the real vocation of his genius, it is nevertheless a world something like the actual universe, a place in which humanity can breathe, and in which there is room for the exercise of real faculties, in which we find ourselves. 'L'Étourdi' was followed soon after by the 'Dépit Amoureux,' a drama to which the same description will apply. It is not yet the accomplished satirist, the laughing censor of the age, whom we find in these two essays at something newer and better than the rude fables of the past. The inspiration of fresh and original genius is as yet but vaguely visible. They are still constructed upon old models, and according to an obsolete law; yet there is an air of life under the masquerade, a gleam of humour now and then, a something of flesh and blood which separates them at once a hundred miles from Pantaloon and Harlequin. Something of the timidity of an adventurer risking himself upon new ground, and groping about him for precedent and guidance as he goes —something of the caution of an inventor who does not yet know how far he may dare, nor if those attentive faces of the public all gazing at him, as he takes this first step into the unknown, may not cloud over before his very eyes —is in the new undertaking; but there is, at the same time, an enlargement and widening out of the world of fancy, a space, an atmosphere, a freedom and wit of dialogue, a perception of character, such as had not been ventured upon before. These daring new attempts put forth so

cautiously—tentative efforts of a leader upon whom the bread of his company depended, and who had many more to consider besides himself—seem to have called forth no uncertain response from the provincial audience. The new Mascarille, who was no other than the old Davus of classical comedy—the knave and slave of Terence and Plautus, scarcely disguised in clothes of florid European finery, and in relations impossible between modern master and servant—was still a step nearer life than Scaramouche; and there was a smack of nature in the reckless youthful folly of the hero, rash in act and hasty in speech, baffling every trick done on his own behalf, which went far deeper than anything that had yet been attempted in the conventional heroics of the early stage.

Thus we find the dramatist on the verge of fame and success after so long an interval of obscurity and labour. All things had at last turned in his favour. He had got a hearing—the gates of court favour, the only gates of the temple of fame in 1658, were opening before him; and a still more effectual opening, that of his own mind and maturing genius, prepared him to take advantage of the great opportunity thus afforded. His apprenticeship had been rough. Twelve years of vagabondism, of poverty, of banishment from all that a Parisian loves, of petty scrambling for the favours of the crowd, poor fare, poor lodging, and small applause, had passed over his head. But now at last—the capacity within him developing and growing every day, the bustling world of Paris with all its humours and madness, its follies and its wit, opening out to his keen observation—there came that tide in the affairs of men which Molière had the good fortune to be able to take at its flood.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY DRAMATIC EFFORTS.

'La Jalousie du Barbouillé,' already referred to, is the simplest and slightest of all Molière's compositions. Neither this nor the 'Médecin Volant,' the only other example of his earliest works which has survived, is in fact a play at all, but only a mere sketch or outline of a play—a *canevas*, as it is termed in the original French —"frameworks" upon which the actors were at liberty to stretch their own powers of invention and improvised dialogue. A single extract will suffice to show the burlesque style of these early productions. When Le Barbouillé offers the philosopher whom he consults money, in order to extract an opinion from him as to his domestic troubles, his offer is indignantly rejected as follows :—

"You take me, then, for a man who may be induced to do almost anything for money—for an interested, mercenary spirit! Let me tell you, my friend, that even if you were to offer me a purse full of pistoles, and if this purse were contained in a rich box, this box in a precious case, this case in a superb casket, this casket in a curiously-worked cabinet, this cabinet in a magnificent room, this room in a charming apartment, this apartment in a splendid mansion, this man-

sion in an incomparable citadel, this citadel in a celebrated town, this town in a fertile island, this island in an opulent province, this province in a flourishing monarchy, this monarchy in the whole world: and if you were to offer me the whole world, in which should be contained this flourishing monarchy, opulent province, fertile island, celebrated town, incomparable citadel, splendid mansion, charming apartment, curiously-worked cabinet, superb casket, precious case, rich box, in which should be contained the purse full of pistoles, I would not care a snap of the fingers for you or your money."

The 'Médecin Volant' is equally extravagant, and still more pantomimic in form. The chief interest of these primitive productions is, that they proved each the germ of more important works.

We make, however, a wonderful step in advance when we come to the 'Étourdi,'—the first real comedy, according to the rules of dramatic art, which Molière produced. The play is imitated from one by Nicolo Barbieri, entitled 'L'Inavvertito,' and consists of a series of plots and devices contrived by the clever and impudent valet, Mascarille,[1] to aid his master, Lélie (the blunderer), in the acquisition of a certain slave named Célie—these plots and devices being as often rendered inefficacious by the indomitable stupidity of the master. We need not attempt to thread the maze of these innumerable schemes, since it would be impossible to give the reader, in the small space at our command, any idea of the rapidity of movement and lively succession of incidents which make the faithful scoundrel's inexhaustible trickery amusing, or

[1] The name of Mascarille is derived from the Italian *maschera*, a mask, under which disguise Molière himself played the part.

the persistent and honest blundering by which his puzzled master throws the cleverness of his scheming into fuller relief. Mascarille, with all his resources, is scarcely even intended for a type of character. He is the lineal descendant of the Davus and Tranio of classic comedy, the parent of Scapin, the "emperor of knaves," as he calls himself; but there is no attempt in him to present any aspect of actual life, nor any plot beyond the succession of ludicrous incidents by which he is alternately foiled and triumphant. On the other hand, the character of the young Étourdi himself stands out with a freshness and vivacity which it is very rare to find in the character of a hero, and which Molière himself seldom puts into the central figure even of his most brilliant plays. There, as elsewhere, the leading gentleman, the conventional lover, has not very much to recommend him. But Lélie, with all his faults, is an attractive being: his very folly is natural and genuine, and there is an instinct of truth in him which is not virtue but foolishness, yet which at once turns the theatrical puppet into a study of human nature. He is not virtuous; he does not mind how many lies Mascarille may tell, and is ready to take advantage even of his thefts,—but nevertheless to himself lying is difficult, and he is constantly betrayed by his own frankness, his incapacity for ruse and deception. And his love is a real and generous sentiment. Even when it suits his purpose to undervalue Célie, he cannot tolerate the base expedient. "To blame where I adore, is to wound me to the very soul!" he cries; and this genuine feeling gives a nobler side to the character of the hot-headed young scapegrace, whose every act is a blunder.

So does the warmth of his love-making when he is smuggled into Trufaldin's house under the unlucky disguise of the Armenian. Mascarille warns him in vain :—

"It matters little that you called the Turks
Heretics, and asserted on your oath
They worshipped for their gods the sun and moon.
All that might pass: but 'twas unbearable
To see how strangely you forgot yourself
In love-making: near Célie, you were like
The boiling pot that heaves on a great fire,
And on all sides boils over.
Lélie. Could I help it?
I scarcely said a word to her.
Mascarille. What matter?
Words are not everything: one single moment
Of such behaviour might cause more suspicion
Than others in a whole long year give room for.
Lélie. What did I do then?
Mascarille. What? every one saw it.
At table when Trufaldin made her take
Her place, you had no eyes except for her;
Red, trembling, with your eyelids in a quiver,
You took no notice when they brought the dishes;
You had no thirst except when Célie drank;
Then from her very hands you seized the glass,
Nor would you have it mixed, nor yet throw out
The remnant of her draught, but drank it up
With ostentatious aiming at the place
Her mouth had touched."

This pretty description in the midst of all the trickery strikes an entirely new note, and shows us for the first time a lovable human being in the hands of the dramatist, and not a mere conventional automaton of the stage.

'Le Dépit Amoureux' is made up of two distinct plays: one consisting of a somewhat intricate plot copied

from the Italian comedy 'L'Interesse' of Nicolo Secchi; the other, which carries out the title of the play, turning on the quarrel and subsequent reconciliation of two pairs of lovers, Éraste and his valet Gros-René, and Lucile and her maid Marinette. The two stories, indeed, are so distinct, that it is customary at the present day to represent only the latter, which forms a complete play by itself. The other portion, too complicated to be capable of description here, is the story of a young woman disguised as a man, with all the errors and doubtful situations naturally consequent upon such a disguise.

By far the prettiest and most amusing scenes are those which contain the real *dépit* or "love-tiff" which gives its name to the play. Éraste and Gros-René, indignant at the treatment they have received from their respective mistresses, determine to break off all intercourse with them; and Gros-René thus delivers himself confusedly of his views with regard to women in general:—

"Look you, master! woman is, as you may say, a sort of animal very difficult to understand thoroughly—one whose nature is much inclined to evil. And as an animal is always an animal, and would never be anything else if it were to live a hundred thousand years, so undoubtedly a woman is always a woman, and will never be anything else so long as the world shall last.

. . . . . .

"A woman's head is like a vane on a house-top, turning to every wind of heaven. That's why our friend Aristotle often compares her to the sea, whence it comes that one says that in the world one can find nothing so *stable* as the wave.

. . . . . .

"For comparison's sake, then, master, as one sees that the sea, when the storm increases, gets furious, the wind blows

and howls, wave against wave making a horrible confusion, and the vessel, in spite of the pilot, now *mounts* up to the cellar and then *sinks* to the attic: so when a woman has her fancies on, one sees a tempest like a hurricane, which wishes to dispute on certain—points; then a certain wind, which —with certain waves—in a certain fashion like a sandbank —when——: in a word, women are the very devil."

This learned but incomprehensible dissertation on the frailty of womankind is interrupted by the arrival of Lucile and her maid Marinette, whereupon the lovers immediately launch forth into mutual recrimination. Éraste returns to Lucile her portrait, and Lucile gives back a diamond ring, &c., she had received from him. They then read and tear up their love-letters, Gros-René egging on his master, and Marinette her mistress, whenever they see any signs of their resentment flagging. However, when they have fully made up their minds to a rupture, they cannot bring themselves to the point of actual separation, and, as in Horace, the old love is rekindled, and the quarrel ends by Lucile asking Éraste to "see her home"! Gros-René and Marinette cannot do otherwise than follow the example of their respective master and mistress; and after having, in language perhaps somewhat less refined, vented their long-pent-up displeasure, and returned their mutual presents,—Gros-René a bunch of ribbons she had given him for his hat, a twopenny knife, and a slice of cheese; Marinette half a hundred Paris pins, a tin chain, and a pair of scissors, —they determine on making their separation irrevocable by breaking a straw together.

"*Gros-René.* To prevent any possibility of our ever being reconciled, we must break a straw: a broken straw, with

honourable folk, settles a question for good and all. Don't look so sweet at me, I want to be angry.

Marinette. Don't make sheep's eyes at me, my heart is too much enraged.

Gros-René. Come, break! That's the way to be sure of never relenting. Break it. What! are you laughing, old girl?

Marinette. Yes, I can't help it.

Gros-René. Deuce take your laughter! There's all my anger cooled down. What do you say,—shall we break the straw, or not?

Marinette. What do *you* say?

Gros-René. But what do *you* say?

Marinette. No; I want to know what *you* say.

Gros-René. Do you consent to my never loving you any more?

Marinette. That's as you like.

Gros-René. No, as you like. Speak out.

Marinette. I'll say nothing.

Gros-René. Nor I.

Marinette. Nor I.

Gros-René. We'd much better stop all this nonsense. Give us your hand. I forgive you.

Marinette. And so do I you.

Gros-René. Lord, what a fool your charms make of me!

Marinette. And what an ass Marinette is when her Gros-René is by!"

It is beyond our power to transfer the airy grace of a dialogue, which after all depends more upon tone and look than words, into another language; but few scenes can be more charming when rendered by the graceful and unexaggerated art of the best French school of acting. Molière often recurred to those delightful representations of youthful rage and reconciliation to lighten his graver work.

CHAPTER III.

HIS FIRST SUCCESSES.

It is not, as has been said, exactly apparent by what means Molière was introduced to the knowledge of the young king and his gay brother, then a youth of eighteen, the darling of the Court. Whether it was the Prince de Conti so often referred to, or some courtier, who had, by happy chance, seen, among all the strolling players who wandered about France, the company which played the 'Étourdi,' it is impossible to tell. But however this may have been, the fact is sure that, on the 24th October 1658, Molière and his troupe gave a performance in "the guard-room of the old Louvre," temporarily fitted up for their reception, "before their majesties and the whole Court." The queen-mother, Anne of Austria, still imposing and splendid, and not yet deprived of the supreme authority which she and her minister, Mazarin, retained so long; Louis in all the glory of his youth, the hope and delight of France—a young king who had all the sympathies of his people still with him, not yet responsible for any evil of government, but the centre of all better anticipations, the representative of the future—a splendid young prince of twenty, loving all

gaieties and pleasures, and open above all to a new sensation; and Monsieur, his young brother, still the curled darling, whom his mother dressed in female robes, and who cultivated all the dandyisms and fineries of the time: such were the patrons of the new actors. The Court which surrounded them was one of the most splendid in history. Nothing finer in satins and velvets, in jewels and gold, in lace and ribbons, has ever been seen, than the fine people who clustered round this beautiful royal family, the mother and her two sons, to whom magnificence of every kind was nature. How many splendid figures might have been there, did we give conjecture room to speak!—a beautiful, dazzling assembly, in which genius and fancy and the finest keen observation were to be found, as well as the gilding and the splendour.

Paris outside, it appears, knew little of what was going on. The eager city, Bazin tells us, was all agog about a whale which was about to be exhibited at Chaillot, and knew nothing of Molière. He had the most select of audiences, nothing that was not noble and courtly,—a wonderful contrast to the good country-folks whom he had been amusing as best he could for years. Among these noble lords and ladies, however, was sprinkled a more curious and more difficult audience, the players of the Hôtel de Bourgogne; a rival company, half amused, half jealous to see what the strollers would produce. The play which Molière and his troupe represented was Corneille's 'Nicomède,' concerning the production of which report says nothing. It shows that our strolling company, notwithstanding the *petits divertissements* by which it had made itself known, had carefully held by the legitimate drama, notwith-

standing that Molière himself fulfilled but poorly a heroic part, and had already been crushed in his ambitious attempt to write a tragedy of his own. So at least it is said, though this may be but an echo of the vulgar sentiment which likes to believe that men of the greatest genius deceive themselves as to what they can do best. When, however, the heroic play, howsoever performed, was over, the manager-actor himself suddenly appeared on the scene, in his own person, and addressed the king with a "compliment," no doubt of the usual extravagance. "Then, after thanking his majesty very modestly for his goodness in excusing the defects of the actors, who had appeared with trembling before so august an assembly, he assured him that only the great desire they had, to have the honour of amusing the greatest king in the world, could have made them forget that his majesty already had much better actors in his service, of whom they were but the humble copyists; but that since the king had so far suffered their country manners, he entreated humbly, as a further favour, that his majesty would now permit him to give one of the little pieces which had gained him some reputation, and with which he had amused the provinces." This diplomatic address, which was evidently intended to smooth down and conciliate the professional listeners, whose presence was more important to Molière than to the royal spectator, was graciously received; and now comes the crisis of Molière's fate. It is scarcely likely that the strollers played Corneille any better than, if as well as, the Parisian company, who probably had begun to congratulate themselves that there was not much to fear

from these new rivals. But here was something in which the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, the king's own servants, were left behind. The mixture of the comic with the tragic was unknown to them, and no doubt they awaited the novelty with mingled contempt and alarm, as something unworthy of their dignity—a piece of "country manners" more fit for a fair than for the presence of a king.

The afterpiece thus brought forward at a hazard, was one of the lost pieces of Molière's early period, a *petit divertissement* in one act, like the 'Jalousie du Barbouillé,' entitled the 'Docteur Amoureux.' After the severe spell of the tragedy, it may be imagined what an unexpected relief to the splendid audience, who were as ready to laugh at everything heroic as if they had lived in the nineteenth century, was the witty dialogue of the latest fable which Molière had woven for his associates. Perhaps (it seems probable) part of the dialogue was left to the ready wit of the actors themselves, of whom Molière was one; or, if not so, it was at least fresh from the brain of the inventor, who played the part of the doctor in love—the pedant-philosopher—always one of his favourite victims. The laughter that followed this unexpected addition to the evening's amusement decided the after-course of Molière's life. He had attained the end which he had, in courtly phrase, declared to be the chief object of his ambition, and which many more distinguished persons than a poor player considered an object worth living for—he had amused the king. No need henceforth to *courir les provinces*. His vagabond life, with all its risks, was over. The king at once bestowed upon the

new troupe who had made him laugh, a settled position and locality. He gave them the title and privileges of the *Troupe de Monsieur*,—the other company, of which Molière declared his to be the humble copyists, but whose opinion on the subject is not mentioned, having already acquired the distinction of calling themselves the *Troupe du Roi*. King Louis granted to the new comedians the privilege of sharing the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon with the Italian company already established there; and his brother "accorded them the honour of his protection, and the title of his players, with an allowance of three hundred livres for each performance." "The three hundred livres were never paid," is, however, the commentary of a member of the company. The young prince, Philippe, is not indeed visible to us at all in the transaction. But Louis from this moment became Molière's faithful protector,—a patron and friend upon whom he could always rely.

The Court, however, was on the eve of leaving Paris when this brief gleam of glory shone upon Molière's path. Two days later the whole splendid train had disappeared, the king having set out for Lyons, whither he went with the intention of marrying one princess, and where another of higher pretensions was offered to his acceptance. The players had little to do with these great concerns. A Princess of Savoy or an Infanta of Spain, what did it matter to Molière? Even the peace which was settled and ratified by the marriage thus projected was less in the player's way than the question how to overcome the critical public of Paris, and win a second victory which should confirm him in his new position. He began at once with the 'Étourdi' and the 'Dépit Amoureux,' accord-

ing to the best authorities, but without any marked success. A different and very spiteful account of this second beginning, by which we are asked to believe that it was only in consequence of his failure in producing the standard dramas that he had recourse to his own, is to be found, however, in a contemporary satire written by one of his rivals of the other theatre, at a later period of Molière's life. The slander and venom of this production are harmless now, Molière's name alone keeping it from utter oblivion; but there is some air of truth in its account of the difficulties with which his beginning was encompassed. He is supposed to be describing the effort it cost him to gain a hearing:—

"We opened with 'Heraclius:' thus beginning,
No fear had I of fortune for the winning.
. . . . . .
Then I took heart, and with a dauntless front
Harangued, placarded, braving every brunt;
But still the current of success we missed.
After 'Heraclius,' 'Rodogune' was hissed:
'Cinna,' and even the noble 'Cid,' receiving,
Nor 'Pompey,' better treatment, left me grieving.
Affronted, lost, not knowing where to turn,
I had a thousand minds to hang or burn;
When lo! a blunder changed this evil sort,
And when I near had sunk, brought me to port:
Instead of Corneille with his laurels won,
I played the 'Étourdi'—and the work was done."

This, though written in malice, seems to give a reasonable and probable version of the facts of the case. The actors of Molière's troupe were not strong enough to cope with the king's players in tragedy. Molière himself had no gift that way, and the qualities which

insured success in one class of performances were not so likely to secure it in the other. But when, perhaps in a kind of despair, he put the 'Étourdi' on the stage, alarmed and doubtful whether an audience accustomed to the classic tragedy would put up with this novel effort — the success was instant and unmistakable. The "spectators were transported," we are told. As it had been the fresh fun and merriment of the 'Docteur Amoureux' which had won the king and Court, so it was the higher humour of the first true comedy which vanquished the people. True, the lying knave Mascarille sprang directly from classical tradition, and the leading idea of a slave to be purchased was not like anything that could happen in France; but Lélie was pure human nature—French flesh and blood, in all the delightful folly, thoughtlessness, self-confidence, and generosity of modern youth.

At this great crisis of his existence Molière himself had reached the maturity of manhood. He was thirty-six, in full mid-current of the way; and he had need of all his strength for the task before him. For it was no small task, to undertake the satisfaction of the public and the maintenance of a troupe of performers in an altogether new vein of dramatic work, with but two plays, besides his trifling stock of farces, "to the good." He could not go on representing these two plays for ever, and in tragedy it was evident that success was very dubious. Thus pressed by the actual necessity of filling his theatre and finding occupation for his players, Molière stood, like Shakespeare, in circumstances which we are disposed now to consider as the worst possible for poetical composition. Like the immortal playwright of

the Globe, before a restless and indifferent crowd, not caring at all whether he prospered or was ruined, and as ready to lend an ear to his rivals as to himself—and at the head of a little band of people dependent upon him—the still immortal though less mighty playwright of the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon was driven, with little time to think, into creation. In the face of all the theories which demand calm leisure and retirement for the production of great works, these two examples stand out unanswerable. In the first case, what lofty imaginations, what depths of tenderness and passion, what high and noble philosophy, "musical as is Apollo's lute," were poured out in answer to this call! Molière was not a Shakespeare. In his mind there was no Lear or Othello, no Portia or Rosalind; only once perhaps at all, and that not till his course was wellnigh over, did he get the length of passion. But the impulse and the work were the same. Both were stimulated like any house-builder by the necessities of the day,—they had to live and to make live the band of followers who trusted in them. No fostering of patronage nor calm of study lent leisure and dignity to their toil. Shakespeare, so much the greater of the two, turned to the grander side of life, and took the heart of man with all its serious passions, woes, and delights, to make his daily bread by. Molière, put to instant action in the same way, snatched at a narrower and less noble triumph, but still a triumph which genius alone could have attained.

It was a bold step which the French dramatist took. He had been, it may be supposed, introduced more or less upon the skirts of society—if not finding admittance to the inner circles of the great, at least approaching here

and there these charmed confines. And of all the fine company in Paris, there was none which Molière was so certain to have heard of, or so likely to have approached, as that of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, which was the centre of the most superfine and exquisite society then existing. In every age distinguished by a special intellectual development, some such laughable overdoing of the refinements of talent has bubbled over in grotesque evidence of the larger heavings of life and genius. In Elizabeth's time there was Euphuism flourishing side by side with Shakespeare's English: in the days of Louis, the Augustan age of France, there were the *Précieuses*. The name was appropriated chiefly to the elegant coterie which collected in Madame de Rambouillet's *salon*, where romance and refinement reigned supreme; where the old-fashioned virtues were rustic and rude in comparison with the fine brand-new delicacies of sentiment and feeling; and where the greatest treat that could be given to society was a reading of a new copy of verses, an anagram, an acrostic, an enigma—the dainty compositions of small poets whom, proud of their own appreciation of genius, the great ladies chose to worship.

These elegant rooms were filled with all that was intellectual in Paris; and never had there been more genius in Paris than at that moment—not to speak of the pretences at it, which men in those days could not quite see through, being still too near to tell, between two pretenders to fame, which was the La Fontaine who was to last for ever, and which the Voiture or Ménage whose reputation was of the most temporary kind. Bossuet, Pascal, La Fontaine, and Racine, some older, some younger, were all Molière's contemporaries; and even Pierre Corneille,

the earliest among them, had still scarcely passed his prime. All that is classic in French literature now, was alive and in motion about the old, narrow, picturesque streets. The young Marquise de Sévigné had not long been married when Molière came back to Paris, and from time to time her bright countenance would appear among the ladies who formed in ecstatic groups round the Abbé Cotin, or who—virtuous upon a sentimental precipice of impropriety—turned Platonic love-making into a science, and between their raptures over a well (or badly) turned verse, made themselves and their lovers ridiculous by a thousand follies of over-strained sentiment. If we might suppose Molière in his own person introduced into one of the elegant assemblies in which Ménage or Voiture, not to say Cotin, read their verses,—or appearing in the perfumed alley (*ruelle*) between a fine lady's bed of lace and satin and her chamber wall of cut velvet or rosy brocade,—looking on, a shy stranger, at the curious scene, while Mademoiselle de Scudéry traced the map of the Pays du Tendre, or Oronte recited his last impromptu,—how easily should we trace by the silent laughter in his eyes the progress of his thoughts! Here was a subject ready to his hand. All the affectations, the follies, the simplicities, the childish vanity, the intellectualism gone mad, of this strange society, were tempting to the satirist. What fun could be made of them!—fun not harsh in the first place at least, tempered by a certain half sympathy, a gleam of tolerance in the midst of the laughter. The cultivation of that science of verse-making, foolishly called poetry, and all the affectations of the pseudo-critics; the absurdities of sentimental courtship long drawn out, with all its extravagant complaints and fantastic delicacies of

feeling,—suggested endless amusement to the new satirist, suddenly made aware of his power, but did not put any gall into his fun or bitterness into his heart. And Molière was so new to Paris and this curious exotic flower of Parisian life, that there can have been no treachery in his first exercise of the censorship of laughter. He had been but a year in the capital, and no intimacy or confidence of friendship bound him to the blue-stocking coterie, which he thus caught at the first glance, and held up laughing to the laughter of all the world.

Whether he was aware what an immense step he had made when he produced the 'Précieuses Ridicules' it is impossible to tell: most probably there was no classification in his mind of his own works; minds busy with imaginative creation are seldom at the moment fully aware of its scientific and social aspect. The success, however, was immediate and unquestionable. Loret, a contemporary chronicler, gives an animated sketch of the new play, which was "much visited by people of every quality." He tells us, in his lively rhymes, that never so great a crowd had been seen in the Hôtel de Petit-Bourbon. Neither the 'Édipe' of Corneille, nor the 'Cassandra' of Bois-Robert, nor the 'Fédéric' of Boyer, were so worthy of the laurel. "It cost me thirty sous," he adds, not without a grudge, "but I laughed for more than ten pistoles." Curiously enough, however, the admiring chronicler does not name Molière, though, besides being the author of the piece, he played the chief part in it. The "Comedians of Monsieur" are named as the players, and that is all.

The social sect of the *Précieux* had originated towards the end of the reign of Louis XIII., in a laudable effort made by the leaders of society (as far as manners, art,

and language were concerned) to correct the coarseness and licentiousness of the literature of the day. Ladies, who might fairly claim to be called illustrious, as well from their birth and station as from their education, led the van of those who endeavoured to introduce the much-desired reform. But the elegance and purity of language and ideas of the epoch between 1620 and 1640 had degenerated in 1660 into exaggeration and absurdity. All that was natural was rejected, and nothing admired but what was enigmatic, subtle, and replete with mannerism. These elegant revolutionaries met together for the purpose of reforming the orthography of the language, and even went so far as to recommend the suppression of what they were pleased to call useless and ugly syllables. The fever was at its height in 1658, when Molière returned to Paris. A few feeble attempts had been made—one of them by the Abbé Cotin, who himself was one of Molière's victims at a later period—to expose the folly into which they were drifting; but it was reserved for the new comedian, fresh from the provinces, to cover these sentimental coteries with confusion. The first blow was a masterstroke. The 'Précieuses Ridicules' convulsed Paris, and startled even the poetical guides of the *salons*. "Take my word for it," Ménage is reported to have said, "we must now burn what we have hitherto adored;" and though this candid acknowledgment of discomfiture is somewhat apocryphal, there can be no doubt that a great victory was gained, and that this manifestation of pedantic folly and false intellectualism here received its death-blow.

The plot of the little drama is simple enough. Madelon the daughter, and Cathos the niece, of Gorgibus, the

two *Précieuses* of the comedy, decline the hands of the two suitors La Grange and Du Croisy, approved and chosen by their fathers, on the ground that the ideas and language of these gentlemen are not sufficiently refined for their taste—especially that their manner of preferring their suit is devoid of all gallantry. The rebuffed lovers, in order to be revenged upon their fantastical mistresses, send their respective valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, dressed up—the one as a marquis, and the other as a viscount—to visit the ladies. The *Précieuses* are exalted beyond measure by the visit of two, as they suppose, leaders of Paris fashion, and by the fulsome and exaggerated flattery bestowed upon them by the disguised valets, and sending for the fiddlers, invite several of their friends to an improvised dance; whereupon the masters, La Grange and Du Croisy, appear upon the stage accompanied by other servants, who strip the disguised marquis and viscount of their borrowed plumes. The *Précieuses*, covered with confusion, receive in addition to this wholesome lesson a smart reprimand from the enraged father, who sees himself the talk and laughing-stock of the town, thanks to the extravagant behaviour of his daughter and niece.

The first scene is merely preliminary; but the second brings us at once into the presence of the heroines. The father, Gorgibus, who is in search of them to demand why they have rejected two desirable suitors, is informed by their maid that they are making pomade for their lips, like the Vicar of Wakefield's daughters. "C'est trop pommadé!" he cries, exasperated.

"*Gor.* A mighty necessity there is indeed for greasing your faces to that extent! What have you done to the gen-

tlemen whom I have just met going out looking so dissatisfied?

Madelon. How could you possibly expect us, papa, to put up with the very irregular proceedings of these gentlemen?

Gor. What fault have you to find with them?

Mad. A fine idea of gallantry theirs is, indeed! What! to begin point-blank by (talking of) marriage?

Gor. And what would you have them begin with? Is not the holy tie to which they aspire a sufficient proof that their intentions are honourable?

Mad. Ah, father! what you say is terribly commonplace. I am quite ashamed to hear you speak so, and you really should get yourself taught to express yourself fashionably. Why, if every one held the same opinions as you, a novel would soon come to an end. The idea of Cyrus marrying Mandane at once, or of Aronce being wedded to Clélie straight off![1] . . . A lover should first of all see at church, or out walking, or in some public ceremony, the person with whom he falls in love; or some fatality should cause a relation or a friend to take him to her house, whence he should come out rapt in deep thought and melancholy. For some time he keeps his passion a secret from the object of his affections, but nevertheless pays her frequent visits, and takes care always to introduce some question of gallantry, which exercises the wits of those present. At last the day of the lover's declaration arrives, and this should be done generally in a remote part of some garden, whilst the company are at some little distance. The declaration is followed by a prompt display of anger on our part, which shows itself by our changing colour, and which for a time banishes our lover from our presence. Afterwards, however, he finds means of conciliating us—of accustoming us insensibly to the discussion of his passion—and at last draws from us an approval which we will make with reluctance. But

[1] Cyrus and Mandane are the principal characters in 'Artamène,' or the 'Grand Cyrus,' and Aronce and Clélie in 'Clélie,' both celebrated novels of Mademoiselle de Scudéry.

to strike at once to the point of marriage, and begin the romance at the wrong end!——"

We translate this passage at some length, because it is an exact analysis of a novel by Mademoiselle de Scudéry. The reader may remember that the immortal Mr Collins, in 'Pride and Prejudice,' also thought it characteristic of "an elegant female" to reply to a proposal at first by a negative.

Cathos in her turn deprecates the matter-of-fact manner of proceeding of the two suitors as follows:—

"I would lay a wager that they have never even seen *La Carte de Tendre*,[1] and that 'love-letters,' 'delicate attentions,' 'gallant epistles,' and 'pretty verses,' are unknown lands to them. . . . They have none of that air which gives you a good opinion of people at first sight. The idea of paying a lovers' visit with legs devoid of all ornaments, a hat without feathers, an ill-kempt head, and a coat showing a woful want of ribbons—good heavens! What lovers, indeed! What a parsimony of dress, what a drought of conversation! Their ties are not made by the fashionable maker, and their breeches are half a foot too narrow."

When Gorgibus addresses them by their proper names, Cathos and Madelon, they inform him that they have assumed the names of Polixène and Aminte, as was the fashion with the ladies of the day. Marotte, the unsophisticated serving-maid, now comes in

[1] The map of "Love Land" was much studied in the *Précieux* society. Love Land is bounded on the north by the Dangerous Sea, and on the west by the Sea of Enmity, with the broad Lake of Indifference on its north-eastern corner. The River Inclination (branching off into Esteem River in the north-east, and Gratitude River in the north-west) traverses it from south to north, leading from New Friendship town through "Tendre sur Inclination" to the two other towns of "Tendre"—the one "sur Estime" and the other "sur Reconnaissance."

to say that a lackey has appeared to announce "a visit from a gentleman," whereupon Madelon tells her to express herself with less vulgarity. "You should say, one of the male necessities wishes to know if you are disposed to be visible." To which she replies, "I don't know Latin, and I have not studied, as you have, 'philophy' in Cyrus the Great." Hearing, however, that the gentleman who waits is the Marquis de Mascarille, Madelon and Cathos bid her show him up immediately, but first tell her to bring the "counsellor of the Graces."

"*Marotte.* What sort of animal is that? You must speak 'Christian' if you want me to understand you.

Cathos. Bring me the mirror, ignoramus that you are! and take good care not to soil its surface by the communication of your own image."

Mascarille now makes his entry, carried in a sedan-chair on to the stage, extravagantly dressed, in an exaggeration of the fashion of the day; and having bestowed a cuff in payment upon one of the porters, shows his true lackey's character by humbly paying the other, who threatens him with one of the chair-poles.

The *Précieuses* reappear, having given the finishing touches to their toilet; and after a bandying of absurd compliments on both sides, Almanzor (the so-rebaptised page) is bid to "roll forward the conveniences for conversation"—*i. e.*, to place chairs. Mascarille declares that his heart is unsafe in such company, and makes as though he must beat a retreat, till upon a notification from Cathos that an "arm-chair has been stretching out its arms for the last quarter of an hour with a desire to embrace him," he combs his wig, and smoothes his lace ruffles, and sits down. He then tells

the deceived and delighted girls, who complain that they do not receive many visits because they are not as yet very well known, that he will procure them the necessary introduction to the gentlemen who work for the 'Magazine of Select Articles,' so that they may be well up in all the newest literary efforts of the day, the madrigals, sonnets, rebuses, portraits,[1] &c., &c.; and, *apropos* of madrigals, he tells them that he is hard at work putting the whole history of Rome into that form of verse, and treats them to an *impromptu* which he had composed the day before for a certain duchess on whom he had been calling, which for its absurdity can only be equalled by the famous sonnet of the 'Femmes Savantes.' The following translation is almost literal:—

"Oh, oh! woe's me! my prudence comes too late;
Whilst without fear your charms I contemplate,
Your stealthy glances steal my heart away,—
Stop thief! stop thief! stop thief! stop thief! I say."

This miserably doggerel composition calls forth loud expressions of admiration from the ladies, and Madelon declares that she would rather have composed only those two words, "Oh, oh!" than a whole epic poem. After himself dilating upon the astounding appropriateness of every word and line, Mascarille volunteers to "sing" his poetical effusion, and this calls forth still more rapturous praises from his enchanted auditors. After various other extravagances, we arrive at the moment when Du Croisy's valet has himself announced under the name of the Vicomte de Jodelet, and is presented by the (false) Marquis as his particular friend and

[1] *Portraits*—a literary composition in which the writer draws his own or some other person's portrait under a pseudonym.

a miracle of bravery, whereupon the two begin to extol each other's deeds of valour; but we must confess that our *Précieuses* were very easily gulled when they did not see the absurdity of Jodelet's assertion, that Mascarille had commanded a regiment of "horse marines," and that the *demi-lune* which they carried by storm at the siege of Arras was no "half" but a "full moon." However, the *dénouement* is now close at hand. The two masters break in, the valets are betrayed, and the *Précieuses* covered with confusion. Gorgibus, roused to a pitch of fury, bids his daughter and niece "go hide their faces for ever; and you" (he continues) "that are the cause of all this folly, extravagant absurdities, pernicious pastimes of idle brains, novels, verses, madrigals, sonnets, may the d—— take you for good and all!"

When the coterie which had thus fallen under the lash made its murmurs of indignation heard, an attempt was made by way of peacemaking to assert that the *Précieuses* of the play were not the blue-stockings of Paris, but *Précieuses* of the provinces—false copies of the true,—as, indeed, with fine dramatic perception, they had been represented to be. But this was not a pretence which could deceive the sharp sight of the real victims, whose wounded *amour propre* saw too clearly the meaning of the assault. After the first performance a sudden pause of two or three weeks occurred before the piece reappeared, — a delay procured by the action of some person of authority, anxious to save the feelings of his friends. The effect of this proceeding, however, was only to add popularity to the satire thus acknowledged. So great was its success, that in order to prevent the issue of a pirated and incorrect publication, Molière

was obliged, against his will, to permit it to be printed, adding a humorous preface, in which he makes an adroit attempt to conciliate his irritated victims. "It is a strange thing that one should be forced into print in spite of one's self," he says; "there is nothing so unjust, and I could pardon any violence but this." "But," he adds—

"I do not wish to play the part of a modest author, and depreciate my comedy. I should offend Paris if I accused it of having applauded a piece of nonsense; and as the public is the absolute judge of this kind of work, it would be impertinent on my part to give it the lie. Even if I had entertained the worst possible opinion of my 'Précieuses Ridicules' before their representation, I ought now to believe that they are worth something, since so many people have spoken well of them. But as a great part of the advantages which were attributed to the work depended on the action and tone of voice, I had no wish that it should be robbed of these advantages, and it appeared to me that its success in the representation was sufficient to have satisfied me. . . . However, I have not been able to escape, and have run the risk of seeing a stolen copy of my piece in the hands of the printers, accompanied by a licence obtained by surprise. I have in vain appealed against this. The necessity has been made evident to me, either to be printed or to have a plea at law—and the last is worse than the first. It is thus necessary to yield to destiny and consent to a thing which would be done whether I consented or not.

"Mon Dieu! how embarrassing it is to bring out a book by a new author the first time of printing! Now, if time had been allowed me, I might have considered it better. I might have taken all the precautions which other gentlemen authors, now my brethren, are accustomed to take on similar occasions. Either I should have procured some great patron to be, in spite of himself, the protector of my work, whose liberality I should have drawn forth by a flowery dedication;

or I should have attempted a fine and learned preface: for books are not wanting which would have taught me to speak learnedly about tragedy and comedy—their etymology, their origin, their definition, and all the rest. I might have spoken to my friends, who, to recommend my piece, would not have refused me either French or Italian verses. I could even have got myself praised in Greek,—and everybody knows that a compliment in Greek is a very fine and effective thing to put in the front of a book. But I am hurried into the world without time to think what is best to do, and I am scarcely allowed to say two words to justify my intention in respect to this comedy. I would fain have made it apparent that it keeps within the bounds of honest and permissible satire; that the most excellent things are subject to be copied by apes who deserve nothing better than to be laughed at; that bad imitations of what in itself is perfect have been in all ages the subjects of comedy; and that for this reason true philosophers and brave soldiers have never thought of being offended by the Doctor or the Captain of comedy, no more than judges, princes, and kings to see Trivelin, or some other, caricature on the stage the judge, and prince, and king. Therefore the true *Précieuses* are wrong to be offended by a representation of the ridiculous copyists who imitate them so badly. However, as I have said, I am allowed no time to breathe, and M. de Luyne is ready to put me into a fine binding on the spot: so be it, since it pleases God."

Though this excuse is skilfully made, M. Aimé Martin points out, with great justice, that "the excellent things" which the 'Précieuses Ridicules' copied, are precisely those which Molière holds up to derision. As for the two rustic *demoiselles* themselves, who are so anxious to be taken for learned ladies, there is a flavour of youthfulness and innocent folly about them which the author himself, we cannot but think, is tender of,

and the spectator finds himself insensibly drawn to the side of Cathos and Madelon; while the trick of the brutal fine gentlemen who plan the discomfiture of these delightful young women, is as little creditable to them, as is the similar but still more cruel trick which Lord Lytton employs in his 'Lady of Lyons.' A similar effect occurs in the English comedy of 'High Life below Stairs,' where the injured master, when he comes in, upsetting all the arrangements of the pleasant company in the kitchen, is quite intolerable to the audience, who are so much more diverted by the lady's-maids and valets than by this intruder. With far more reason Mascarille, in all his elegance and refinement, is more interesting than his master. Whether Molière had in his mind, underneath his chief subject of satire, and half contrary to it, another and deeper current of philosophic laughter at the wider conditions of humanity itself, who will venture to decide? Genius sees more and further often than it is itself aware.

Either, however, Molière was alarmed by the prompt identification of the objects of his satire, and by finding himself thus confronted by the possible enmity of a coterie so influential—or the hesitation, and perhaps, up to a certain point, timidity of mind which had made his advance in the direction of authorship hitherto so slow and gradual, returned after this first brilliant essay. Certainly his next effort carries us back at once into the region of the 'Étourdi,'—into the commonplaces of the theatre. 'Sganarelle,' the next piece produced, is a mystification *à l'Italienne*, a brief and lively combination of mistakes and witticisms, "a simple *canevas Italien*, embroidered with excellent verses, which brought out

the admirable talent of the author," but nothing worthy of more special notice—except, indeed, the invention of Sganarelle himself—a personage as distinct as any of the traditionary characters who held the stage before him, but, like them, rather an abstraction or type of character than an individual. Up to this moment Molière's chief creation had been Mascarille, the emperor of knaves, the ever-faithful yet ever-lying valet, who cheats, steals, and perjures himself for his master, but is always true to his interests, sticking at nothing which can advance them,—a character, if character he can be called, which is a direct heritage to the modern stage from the antique. Even in the entirely new ground of the 'Précieuses,'—trenchant satirical sketch of the follies of the moment, as unlike as possible to the traditionary compositions of the theatre—he had been still the chief agent. The Sganarelle, however, is a new species, destined to the same often varied yet unvarying part, progressing from one play to another like his predecessor, but more human, more individual than he. In the play which bears his name he stands out before us in full perfection, a true citizen of the lower class—matter-of-fact, yet full of rude humour—shrewd, not unkind—self-opinionated, self-sufficient, easily taken in, but cunning, and as ready to deceive as to be deceived; a burly figure, honest enough, yet by no means insensible to the attractions of vice, and quite willing to take his pleasure where he can find it, with a jovial indifference to morality. No sort of romance or halo of imagination is thrown about this robust companion. He is the rude cynic of common life—greedy, graceless, cowardly, and mercenary—yet his

gros rire is always amusing, and brightens every scene in which he appears; and there is a kind of honesty of character in him altogether apart from the honesty of principles which he is entirely destitute of. In this, his first appearance, he is jealous, and the victim of the most transparent delusion, but extremely comical in his suspicions, in his grotesque distress over his supposed dishonour (which, after all, is quite too ethereal a grievance to touch him really), and in his cowardice and vanity—none of which, however, move us to actual contempt, the nature of the burly and fleshly *bonhomme* being too little elevated to demand any fine human qualities. That Molière should have invented this character for himself is odd enough, except that its very grossness and matter-of-fact complexion give room for many a shrewd assault upon the vanities of the time,—many a gleam of trenchant sarcasm, all the more brilliant and piercing that it leaps suddenly from so apparently opaque a sheath.

After the amusing little play in which this important person first sees the light, Molière had his first failure—a not unmeaning incident in the career which was now rising to the fullest height of reputation and prosperity. The first of his serious plays, 'Don Garcie de Navarre,' which immediately followed 'Sganarelle,' is not of a kind which could ever be popular. It is a story of love and jealousy, never rising to any tragic issue. The hero is the victim of innumerable accidents, all cleared up yet always recurring; and his jealousy is too easily awakened, too unreasonable and persistent, to kindle sympathy. The style is often fine and stately, and there is a certain melancholy grandeur in the jealous lover;

but nothing short of the gloom of tragedy could reconcile us to his frequent despairs and repentances, or to the tedium of the often-repeated mistakes by which he is driven into frantic doubt and misery. The effect of the whole piece is monotonous and oppressive. A noble and virtuous princess, subject to continual misconception, is scarcely more enlivening than the noble and virtuous prince who is constantly wronging her; and while we can easily understand how the dramatist, feeling himself at the bottom of his heart only a buffoon when all was said, should, as soon as he felt the exhilaration of success, have made a desperate attempt to express the more serious side of his genius, and attain to something more beautiful and refined than 'Sganarelle'—we cannot wonder at the failure of the elaborate and melancholy effort, which was so great a contrast to all that went before. "After having made jealousy ridiculous in the grievances of Sganarelle, he attempted to clothe that passion with eloquence and nobility in the prince Don Garcia," says a judicious critic. But the attempt failed completely. The receipts, sure thermometer of the theatre, went down at once, falling to their very lowest after a few nights of the unfortunate piece, which Molière had the good sense to withdraw. This sharp lesson, no doubt, must have brought some bitterness as well as enlightenment with it. It sent him back to that sphere of comedy which he must now have felt, no doubt with some pangs of disappointment, to be the only sphere for him. The reader will not, probably, entertain so low an opinion of 'Don Garcie de Navarre;' but at the best it has never received any enthusiastic appreciation, and the most we can say for it is,

that it furnished some scenes to the 'Misanthrope' in after-days.

From the cold shade of failure thus encountered, Molière, however, emerged into brightness and prosperity again in the 'École des Maris,' or 'School for Husbands,' by which he reinstated himself in popular favour. This play can scarcely be separated from its pendant, 'L'École des Femmes,' which followed after an interval. The story in both is in a great measure the same, but treated with a difference, and in the latter with a boldness and force unknown to the former production. The 'École des Maris' brings before us two brothers, elderly and serious, who have the guardianship of two young girls, sisters, whom they respectively intend to marry, but whom they treat in the most dissimilar way,—Ariste, the first brother, giving his ward Léonor every liberty, and his full confidence; while Sganarelle (a very different personage from the Sganarelle we have just been describing, and indeed the only disagreeable bearer of the name) shuts up Isabelle in the strictest seclusion, distrusts her completely, and will give her no freedom at all. The way in which this sullen, jealous, and difficult taskmaster is outwitted by the girl whom he has isolated from the world, and is made to be unwittingly the go-between, through whom her lover and she arrange everything, forms the plot of the drama. Needless to say that the trust and freedom in which the other sister is allowed to live, produce the very best results, while Sganarelle is tricked, deceived, and discomfited at every turn.

The 'École des Femmes' is founded on a situation almost exactly similar, although there is no second

heroine in it to form a contrast with Agnès, the simple maiden, whom her guardian and would-be husband, Arnolphe, keeps in entire ignorance of the world, without education and society, simple and uninstructed as a child,—but who manages, as well as Isabelle, to carry on her own love-affairs under the very eyes of her guardian, outwitting all his scrutiny and precaution. It is a little curious that Molière's mind should apparently have so dwelt upon this subject, just at the moment when he, a man of nearly forty, was about to marry a young girl of seventeen, and one who, like the wards of Sganarelle and Arnolphe, must have been more or less in a dependent and protected position, if not in his own house, at least in the immediate community that surrounded him. Was it Armande Béjart, and the way of training her to be the best of wives and women, that occupied the mature lover? or was the temptation to laugh at himself and jeer away any doubts he might have,—or at least the faculty which can subsist even without genius, of seeing the ludicrous aspects in which his own position might appear to others,—the influence which kept him to this theme? The imagination can scarcely refuse to fancy some such reason for dwelling on such a subject.

Molière seems to us to have thus composed, twice over, the kind of half-comic, half-serious picture which a man might make of himself in a dilemma which he did not know how to manage—if only to see how he looked in it, what was his best way out of it. Was it safe to be suspicious, over-careful, trembling at every chance of evil: or all-trustful, fearing nothing? and then, if he had begun to feel how readily he himself might fall into any trap of seeming ingenuousness, made sweet by

beautiful smiles and tears, might it not have been a relief to him to make such a dupe of Sganarelle, yet subtly, secretly, take all the sting out of the situation by making it Sganarelle's fault? If there was not something of this feeling in the recurrence of the theme, it is strange that it should have haunted him so closely at this special moment of his life. The 'École des Maris' was first played in June 1661, the 'École des Femmes' in the end of 1662, and about half-way between, in February of the latter year, he married. The coincidence, at least, is not without interest.

Molière's marriage was indeed an event of great importance in his life, with even more than the usual domestic influence upon his happiness. He had been for years the intimate companion of three or four Béjarts, who had been members of his troupe from the earliest chapter of its career. Madeleine Béjart, above all, had held a most prominent place in the little community of which he formed the central figure. She was, we are told, an excellent actress, but not a woman of irreproachable life, and her connection even with Molière himself, as has been mentioned, had been supposed to be of a doubtful kind. When, however, the strollers returned to Paris, a young member of the Béjart family, no less than twenty-seven years younger than Madeleine, makes her first appearance in history, though she had been, in all probability, for a great part of her life, the pet and nursling of the friendly and faithful, if not very moral and spotless, troupe of which Madeleine Béjart was one of the chief members. For a long time this young Armande was supposed, by all the writers on the subject, to be the daughter of Madeleine; her marriage

certificate, however, entirely contradicts this idea, stating her to be the youngest sister of that well-known family. Thus described, and attended by her brothers and sisters, and the old mother, who had brought so many actors into the world, Armande made her appearance before the altar at St Philippe du Roule, and became the wife of the famous and now prosperous actor, who was already basking in the rays of Court favour. The entire family seems to have collected to do the young bride honour: and so did the family on the other side, the good and respectable *bourgeois*, Jean Poquelin, and various members of his kindred. The young Armande was seventeen, the bridegroom forty, and there was more ground than usual for the tremors which generally attend such a union. The circumstances were so peculiar that Molière's enemies soon after brought against him the horrible and revolting accusation that it was his own daughter whom he had married. And though there never was any real evidence in support of this slander, yet the condition of the society in which two women, even supposed to be mother and daughter, could both be connected with the same man, the one lawfully, the other unlawfully, is horrifying enough. Into the details of this question it would be, for obvious reasons, quite inappropriate to enter here.

Armande Béjart had grown up in the strange family circle in which, more or less peaceably, the comedians lived together, and no doubt had been trained to take their bewildering relations as a matter of course. She was not — as who could expect she should be? — a model wife, nor was Molière happy in this new tie; but he seems to have loved her passionately, and there is something strangely touching in the way in which the

middle-aged dramatist sets himself to play upon the different follies that might or could be perpetrated by men in circumstances similar to his own. Unconsciously, no doubt, the hero of his piece grows into a caricature of jealous suspicion or of calculating folly in his hands; and the tricks of the young coquette, whose natural tendency to intrigue neither severe restraint nor simpleton-innocence could extinguish, are palliated with a dramatic appropriateness, yet subtle human folly, which is scarcely less than pathetic even when it is most amusing. Would she deceive him? was she sure to deceive him?—alas, yes! all that he knew of human nature in such circumstances made the likelihood great: but it would not be her fault,—it would be the fault of old Sganarelle with his brutal distrust and severity, yet credulous deceivableness; or of old Arnolphe with his foolish theories and attempts to put a stop to the force of nature. But Molière himself, more kind than Sganarelle, more wise than Arnolphe, did he deserve a better fate?

Before, however, this marriage took place, Molière's life had brightened greatly under the favourable influence to which his genius owed its full development. He had been fortunate enough, when he first played before the king, to attain the end which, according to his own high-flown explanation, was the highest satisfaction that life could give,—he had succeeded in amusing the greatest of monarchs; and Louis had evidently conceived a favourable opinion of him. On several other occasions this favourable impression had been renewed, and one interesting conjunction of these great men is specially noticeable. The players were sent for to amuse the latter days of Mazarin, and played before him in his chamber at

the Louvre, where he lay stretched upon his sofa, while the young Louis stood behind, leaning against the couch of his subject-ruler, and no doubt seeing the day approach when he should be free from the yoke of the great minister, and able to rule in his own person. Molière played the 'Étourdi' and the 'Précieuses Ridicules' before this remarkable group, surrounded by all that was brilliant in France, and by crowds of courtiers waiting eagerly for the new day that was about to dawn. A few months later Mazarin died, and this new day—the most splendid, if also in its consequences the most disastrous, of any in French history—rose. Perhaps no man in France was more affected by the change than Molière. M. Bazin, whom we have already so often quoted—a writer who has examined with much critical acuteness all the facts discovered or refuted by the various generations of Molière's biographers—gives a striking *aperçu* of the kind of union which formed itself from the earliest days of Louis's reign between the king and the player. It was, he says, "something more than a disdainful or frivolous protection—it was a movement of affectionate intelligence as prompt as sympathy and as lasting as egotism."

"From the moment when these two men, placed at such a distance in the social order—the one a king freed from all restraint, the other an unequalled comedian but still timid moralist—saw and understood each other, a sort of tacit association established itself between them, which permitted the latter to dare everything, and promised him full assurance and protection, upon the sole condition of respecting and of amusing the former. We must add that never public treaty to which the faith of a monarch was solemnly engaged could have been more sincerely executed; that at no emergency, in no circumstances, was the safeguard given to the

writer against all the resentments that his art might provoke, ever withdrawn from him. It is a mere jest at our expense, such as historians too often indulge in, to place Molière among the number of those thinkers who suffered persecution in their time. On the contrary—and this is much to his praise—never man pursued his way more evenly, or was through all his career less shaken in it. He had, no doubt, the enemies he made—his rivals, the individuals and classes offended by his attacks, professions, coteries, even the Church itself; but neither individuals nor classes could harm him, or even ventured to attempt against him anything which went the length of violence. The incessant war which he levied against the wrongs and ridicules of his age brought him innumerable triumphs, but never cost him a wound. Everywhere and always we find him encouraged, rewarded, indemnified. When he was attacked in ways which influence public opinion, he had full freedom of reply,—a freedom which he used fully, it might almost be said, abused; and even the cruelty into which he sometimes allowed himself to be drawn was considered in him nothing more than a legitimate revenge. He to whom all things were thus permitted was no poor knight-errant fulfilling his mission at his proper risk and peril, exposed to vengeance, and fearing to be abandoned to his fate. A caprice, for once enlightened, of sovereign power, gave him confidence and strength; his genius gave him all the rest."

M. Bazin proceeds to show that it was in the representation of the 'Fâcheux,' one of the dramatist's next productions, that King Louis first realised and recognised the great qualities of Molière, and the glory which such a dependant was likely to shed round his Court. The first representation of this brilliant little play was given at Vaux, in the house of Fouquet,—one of the extravagances which brought about that minister's ruin. And if the impulse which produced the 'Précieuses' was

a daring one, what will be said of this piece in which the comedian had the audacity to hold the mirror up to the Court itself, presenting before their astonished eyes himself in the person of the hero, wearied and afflicted by a swarm of *Fâcheux*—bores, fine gentlemen, and courtiers—each spreading forth his own favourite vanity, the one more tedious, more troublesome than the other? This dash of extreme daring, coming suddenly after a long interval of caution and timidity, seems to have been characteristic of Molière. Taking fright after the 'Précieuses,' he had dropped back into regular and semi-conventional comedy, long enough to recover his courage; and now he had evidently got up his spirit again to the length of a still more audacious fling, not only at contemporary manners, but, bolder still, at his own chosen audience. "From the first word," says Bazin, "you perceive that the player-author has not placed himself in an imaginary world, far off, heroic, or trivial, but that he is, in fact, a personage of the same country, of the same condition, as his audience—a true marquis, like the most plumed and ribboned of those before him. . . . The *Fâcheux* whom he passes in review are all of that quality, or connected with it. Here then, all at once, the stage is placed on the level of the spectators; on one side and on the other appear the same men, the same ornaments, the same feathers, the same attitudes, except that on the side from which the folly has been copied all are silent and listen, whereas on the other side where the imitation is, there is movement, action, laughter."

Éraste, the hero, full of his own serious business, (it is but a love-affair after all—but on the stage, is not that the gravest business of life?) is stopped and interrupted

by one butterfly after another—so many different manifestations of the elegant dandy of universal comedy, the very same lordling that disgusted Hotspur, a class which seems to have been specially invented for the use of the satirist: but dressed in all the elaborate finery and extravagant costume of the day, and each with his favourite folly, his hobby, with which he delays the purpose and wastes the time of the exasperated hero. One has a new air of his own invention, a new step on which to ask the impatient spectator's opinion; another bores him with the account of a game at cards. "I had the ace of clubs, (think of my ill-luck!) the ace, the knave, the king, the eight and ten of hearts," yet lost the game; "could you believe it possible?" Two others, this time *Précieux*, and eloquent philosophers, adjure him to decide between them on a sentimental dispute whether a lover ought to be jealous. Then the marquises have a moment's reprieve, and it becomes the turn of the suitors, who beg for Éraste's good offices with the king. Who could doubt that it was "as good as a play" to see the countenances of the courtiers as they looked on speechless, and saw themselves held up to the ridicule of the world? As for Louis, the chief spectator of all, it is impossible to suppose a piece of malice more piquant, more amusing, to a young monarch with whom it was a point of honour to hold himself on a level of semi-divine superiority above all these butterflies. For him there was at once the enjoyment of the play and the still more keen enjoyment of the dismay, the consciousness, the indignation round him. Molière knew what he was doing,—he knew that the folly of a courtier could be to no man so apparent as to the object of the courtier's servilities, the master

always more or less conscious how much egotism was in the adulation he inspired, and never sorry to see the fluttering throng around him divined and laughed at. After the play was over, Louis, it is said, himself condescended to indicate a form of folly which the satirist had missed. He pointed to his *grand veneur*, the master of the hounds. "There is one you have left out," said the royal critic, with a flattering suggestion that was more than praise. On the instant Dorante, pursuing his "stag of ten," sounding his horn in the depths of the forest, swearing and declaiming against the rustic on a clumsy mare, with villanous hounds, who comes in his way and spoils sport, is added to the little gallery. Never was there a more busy, self-occupied, important company of bores, each bent upon his own folly. As one after another came upon the stage in remorseless realism and truth to fact as well as nature, what a flutter of terror and expectation must have been among the victims! each marquis fearing that his turn would come next, and every gallant anticipating nervously the exposure of his special weakness.

The 'École des Femmes,' to which reference has already been made, and which succeeded the 'Fâcheux,' was in some respects still more daring, though we cannot believe that Molière was conscious, or had any distinct intention, of assailing the far greater and more potent forces which felt themselves challenged in it. The chief personage in the play (though it would be out of place to call him the hero) is the pedantic moralist Arnolphe, the type not of hypocrisy but of rigid severity and egotism—who, after declaring his doctrine that "extreme ignorance" is the only safeguard of a woman's honour, and that all she needs to know is "to pray, to

love me, to sew, and to spin"—gives to the innocent Agnès, the type on her side of absolute (but not stupid) simplicity, a 'Manual of the Duties of a Married Woman,' with a daily exercise to be used by her along with her prayers. In this the religious portion of the community, always suspicious of attack, saw, or thought it saw, an attempt to ridicule the books of devotion so much in use at the time, as it saw also, in Arnolphe's address to his ward, a resemblance to, and caricature of, a sermon. But the play appears to us much more like a peace-offering to the insulted *Précieuses* than a covert assault upon religion, — the foolish Arnolphe, whose policy is held up to ridicule throughout, being just such a creation as was most likely to discredit all vulgar and commonplace scorn of the *Précieuses*. "A clever woman is a bad prophecy," he says; "I will have nothing to say to a fine wit. I would rather have an ugly woman who was stupid, than a clever woman who was beautiful." The Agnès who is trained by this amiable person is the emblem of simplicity; but notwithstanding, her love-intrigue is managed with some skill, and Arnolphe is caught in his own trap. Thus the whole inference of the piece is that stupidity and ignorance are poor guardians, and that the rude contemner of instruction in woman is of all fools and dupes the one most hopelessly deceived. Nothing could be more plain than this lesson. It is the *contre-coup* of his own satire, the protest of genius against its own extravagance, a sign of compunction for the laughter he had himself caused; for this incarnation of enmity to the *Précieuse* and hater of clever women is the most brutal and unsympathetic of all Molière's curmudgeons. Even

the Sganarelle of the 'École des Maris,' though not attractive, is less disagreeable than Arnolphe. To be sure the dramatist's heart melts over his offspring, and the innocent Agnès is not foolish but only simple and charming in her simplicity; but the jealous guardian-lover who consigned her to stupidity for his own safety, and did all he could to make her a fool, is himself made a fool of with delightful poetic justice. The offended ladies perhaps did not appreciate this subtle attempt at conciliation, but yet there never was a victim sacrificed more distinctly in the shape of a peace-offering.

We have said that the story of the 'École des Femmes' is very much like that of the 'École des Maris;' however, as it gave rise to a little attendant literature of its own, it may be well to enter into this play at greater length. Arnolphe is the representative of jealous middle age, full of rigid theories and selfish purpose, always suspecting and deceived, yet strongly determined to do what has never yet been done,—to train, as has been said, a model wife for himself by keeping her mind entirely undeveloped, and her imagination immaculate from all knowledge of good and evil. Returning from an absence, this strict guardian finds his ward (who is quite ignorant of his matrimonial intentions) in the same state of sweet and tranquil indifference in which he left her. No, she has not been melancholy: she has finished his six night-gowns and head-gear: she is never bored: nothing has happened to disturb her. He is delighted with this calm. "My fine ladies," he cries, "heroines and philosophers, dealers in tenderness and fine sentiments, I defy all your verses and romances to equal this modest ignorance!" But while Arnolphe

stands thus apostrophising, there enters a certain young Horace, the son of his friend Oronte, who has scarcely recognised him before he hastens to tell him of his adoration for "a young creature who lives in that house," and whom he intends to carry off—for which purpose it is that he has just borrowed some money from his old friend. Arnolphe, without betraying himself to the young man, rushes, frantic, indoors to the girl, whom he questions about this youth, and from whom he receives the most ingenuous and candid confession that she has indeed seen Horace, that he has visited her, and made himself agreeable to her. Angry and alarmed, yet half mollified by the simple acknowledgment, Arnolphe declares that he will have her married directly. Agnès takes this suggestion with the same smiling tranquillity. "Yes, as soon as he pleases," she says; and Arnolphe, persuading himself that her frankness is a sign of innocence, hastens to make the necessary arrangements. Horace moreover, hurrying in, informs him that he has been turned from his lady's door by the servants, and that she herself has spoken to him severely from the balcony, and thrown a stone at him—which delights the elderly bridegroom; until Horace proceeds to say that round the stone was wrapped a letter, in which the spotless Agnès declares her love with the same simplicity which has so much comforted Arnolphe. Again plunged into fury and despair, the disappointed guardian keeps a strict watch, but in vain; the lovers manage to meet, and Horace at last, like another Étourdi, confides to Arnolphe's charge the runaway Agnès herself—who has declared her determination to escape with him from the marriage with which she is threatened. When Arnolphe finds

her once more in his power, there ensues a scene of reproaches and relentings full of passionate feeling, in which the elderly lover rises to a height of tragic disappointment and melting tenderness, that transfers the interest of the spectator at once from the pretty young people to the elderly ungracious personage, whose conflict of feeling is so intense and real. At the height of the storm, while he is denouncing her, a soft word, a mild look, brings him again to her feet. "Little traitress, I pardon you all. I give you back my love," he cries—"that word, that look, disarms my wrath;" and he pleads as, at a later period, Molière himself was doomed to plead. After this, however, comes in a pair of old fathers,—invaluable inventions of the stage,—the father of Agnès, whom no one knew anything about, and the father of Horace; when it is discovered that Horace and Agnès have in reality been affianced from their cradles, and Arnolphe is thrown back with poetical cruelty into that chill of loneliness and desertion which, in the drama, is the natural fate of all old persons who interfere with the happiness of young lovers.

Molière had never reached so high a point of power as in the scene last referred to (Act v. sc. 4). The whole play, indeed, is pervaded by a deeper strain of feeling, a touch of passionate reality, of which heretofore his works had shown no evidence. But it was not this powerful scene which caught the attention of the public so much as the one previously described (Act iii. sc. 2), in which the old guardian-lover gives to his ward the "Maxims of Marriage," which she is recommended to use with her daily devotions. His threat of the "boiling caldrons," in which women are to be plunged in hell, was

taken by some good people to be a sneer at the penalties denounced in sermons — as the "Maxims" were considered an attack upon manuals of devotion. "It is incontestable," says Bazin, "that the quarrel between Molière and the devout originated in this piece." "They did not go so far," he adds, "as to say it publicly," but they resented the supposed insinuation of a laugh against religion by all kinds of insinuations on their side, and stirred up a general rising against Molière of the classes whom he had offended. So strongly did this opinion gain ground, that a personage already often named—the Prince de Conti, whose former relations with Molière seem so doubtful, yet to whom is constantly given the credit of being his early patron—went out of his way to point out these scenes as examples of the "open and unconcealed immodesty" of the comedies of his time, among which, he says, "nothing more scandalous could be found." The modern reader will find it difficult to discover either the immodesty or the impiety. But it is, unfortunately, only too easy to produce a prejudice in the minds of simple people of strong religious feelings, though there does not seem the slightest ground to suppose that any idea of disrespect to religion had so much as crossed the mind of the dramatist.

Evidently, however, the imputation galled him; and he was moved to adopt measures of self-defence, such as are (we think) to be earnestly deprecated in literature, however they may solace wounded pride. The next two dramatic works which Molière put upon the stage were nothing less or more than elaborate and passionate attempts to exculpate himself, and carry the war into the enemy's country,—mingled apologies and

reprisals of the most vehement kind. The 'Critique de l'École des Femmes' does this by means of a dramatic dialogue, in which a marquis, a fine lady of the *Précieuse* order, and a rival dramatist make a joint attack upon the author, who is defended on his side by two keen and delicate feminine wits, and one man. The idea of entertaining the public with this piece of self-defence shows what confidence Molière had acquired in the interest of that public — confidence chiefly derived, no doubt, from the support of the king. The arguments in such a piece do not merit discussion, —everybody knows how feeble are the adversaries in a literary dispute of this kind, when fortune is all on one side, and the controversy can end but in one way. What doubt that the dramatist would prove himself right and his opponents ridiculous? But unimportant, nowadays, as this is among the works of Molière, it was by no means so void of consequence then. A literary quarrel is always more or less amusing, if cleverly conducted, to the lookers-on; and perhaps there were mute inglorious Molières in the crowd to whom it gave a sensation of pleasure to see the great satirist expose his own weakness as he had exposed the weakness of others. At this distance the sympathetic student will pass over this painful and elaborate self-defence, with only less repugnance and dislike than must be excited by its still more disagreeable sequel, the 'Impromptu de Versailles.'

The 'Critique' called forth other Critiques, as might have been looked for; and at the special command of the king, we are told, Molière took in hand to reply to them. He did this in a second dramatic sketch, the 'Impromptu,' this time taking the form of a rehearsal, in

which he and his troupe appeared under their own names but in the dresses of a *marquis ridicule, marquis fâcheux, marquise façonnière, servante précieuse*, &c., and under cover of a supposed piece for which they had not had time to study their parts, discussed over again the subject of the 'Critique' and its counter-Critiques, Molière himself condescending to give imitations of his rivals of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and assailing by name the author of one of the little pieces which had been written against him. It is with a certain sense of moral downfall and humiliation that we glance over these two dramatic special-pleadings. Perhaps the France which it was Molière's mission to convict of all her follies, exposing her to the judgment and laughter of posterity, would have been incomplete without this exposition of the satirist himself,—merciless, cruel, and petty in his vengeance, forgetting even his own dignity and what was due to his genius in the fervour of his offence and wrath. Altogether the spectacle afforded us is nothing less than pitiful. The poor excuse in it that it is done by the king's desire, is almost an aggravation of the offence; for the adroit flattery by which the dramatist, while showering his ridicule upon the "marquises" who form a great part of the Court, keeps the king himself always on his pinnacle of semi-divinity,—the fountain of all honour, his pleasure the highest standard of success, his dissatisfaction the only thing to fear,—is not creditable to such an intelligence as that of Molière. "Have not I obtained for my comedy all that I could wish," he says, "since it has had the happiness of pleasing those august persons whom it is my special effort to please?"

There is nothing which we could so much wish to

wipe out of the record of Molière's life as these two efforts of self-defence; although, we say it with regret, they give us a glimpse of the taste and manners of the time, which, by saving them from being utterly worthless, makes them injurious, — a lasting reproach alike to his character and to his genius. Happily few readers think of turning from the better fare provided them, to pasture upon antiquated recriminations like these.

The affection of Louis XIV. for his player was evinced about the same time by a still more practical proof. The king recorded his tacit disapproval of the rising tide of hostile criticism, by placing the name of Molière in a grant of pensions to the most distinguished French writers, giving him as an "excellent comic poet" the sum of a thousand livres; and when one of the offended actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, caricatured upon the stage in the 'Impromptu,' brought, in his rage, the hideous accusation against Molière, which has been already referred to—the king showed his contempt of so vile an attack by becoming the godfather of a child born in the beginning of the year 1664, the first child of the marriage. Thus Molière was defended and protected on all sides, encouraged to defy criticism, and assured in every difficulty that might come in his way of all-powerful support. He had taken his will of the affectations of society—the blue-stockings, the courtiers, the "marquises"—in all their varieties of frivolity and absurdity, and throughout all the king had laughed and applauded; for few kings object to the discomfiture of the courtiers, and there is flattery in the very inference that the master is sufficiently clear-sighted to see through all flattery, and to recognise with lofty superiority the follies around

him. Even in the little poem by which Molière thanked his royal patron for his pension, he could not refrain from another impalement of his favourite victim. In these lively verses he bids his muse disguise herself as a marquis. "You know what is needful," he says, describing the hat charged with thirty feathers, the costly peruke, the huge falling collar, the cloak caught up by a ribbon.

"Thus all your beautiful clothes
Adjusted so sweetly,
Make the round of the guardroom, and fully disclose;
Then combing discreetly
Your locks, look around you familiarly, meetly,
And those whom you recognise,
Do not fail, whoe'er may blame,
To greet them by their name,
To whatever rank their merits may rise,
For this easy egality
Gives to all who use it an air of quality.
Scratch with your comb at the door
Of the king's chamber; and then
If you find there a crowd of men,
As may be—jump up from the floor,
Or hold up your hat with the feather
To show where you stand, no small beer,
But a very fine sight altogether,
And call out, whoever may hear,
Loud, your voice in its natural flow,
Mr Usher, the Marquis of So-and-so!"

After further instructions to the muse as to how she is to push her way forward, elbowing everybody, determined to be first, showing herself even to the usher a marquis not to be repulsed, the poet glides into adulation as he tells her how to present herself to the king.

"But a great prince never cares
Save for compliments brief and true,
And ours, above all, has other affairs
On hand than listening to you.
What can he care for incense or praise?
The moment your voice you raise
To make his grace and your gratitude seen,
He will know at a glance all you can mean.
And with that smile that softly rises,
That air that gives him o'er all hearts sway,
He will pass upon his way,
And this your need suffices,—
Consider your compliment said, I pray."

Thus the poet flattered and the king listened; and what if the marquises raged around?—the butterflies could do no harm. Even the more serious portion of the community, dully waking up to a consciousness that priests and devout persons suspected the laughing comedian of a wish to carry his caricature into more sacred regions, could do little against him. And the suspicion itself made his audiences greater, and filled the treasury of the troupe, and helped him to the luxuries he prized.

We may conclude this chapter with one of the gayer ebullitions of his wit, in which there was no after-taste of bitterness — the 'Mariage Forcé' — a trifle thrown together in all haste to afford a framework for a ballet in which (such was the fancy of the time) the king himself wished to appear in the costume of a gipsy. We may take it as the last work of this period, when as yet he had but touched upon his great office of public moralist and satirist. True, his path was already strewn with slaughtered moths and butterflies; affectations of lan-

guage, of taste, of dress and manners, had given him occasion for the frankest laughter. But all his most serious work was yet to come.

The 'Mariage Forcé' is very short, and of the simplest construction. It turns upon the familiar and often-repeated incident of a projected marriage between an old bridegroom and a young bride. The familiar Sganarelle, with whom Molière's audiences were by this time perfectly acquainted, is the gay bridegroom, and he is introduced to us in the first scene, in delighted anticipation of the pleasures of marriage—"a pretty wife who will give him a thousand caresses, who will pet him and rub him when he is tired;" and "little faces which will resemble him like two drops of water," and who "will call him their papa when he comes in from town, and prattle in the prettiest way possible." "I think already I see half-a-dozen round me," he cries, with a chuckle of pleased vanity and satisfaction, as he asks counsel of his old friend whether or not he should marry. The friend, indiscreet as friends so often are, begins to count up what his age may be,—a process little approved by the intending husband; but on seeing that Sganarelle's heart is set upon the marriage, Géronimo gives in, and agrees with him that fifty-two is a very fine age, and that to marry "that young Dorimène, so gay and fashionable," is the best thing he can possibly do. When his friend leaves him, Sganarelle, slightly puzzled, by something in Géronimo's tone, pauses to remark to himself, with something that reminds us of the complacent fatuity of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, "This marriage ought to be a happy one, considering the delight it gives to all the world. I make everybody laugh to

whom I talk about it. And here I stand, the happiest of men." At this moment he sees his bride approaching, and with all the unctuous satisfaction of an elderly lover, rubs his hands and gloats over her perfections. "How charming she is! What an air, and what a figure! Can a man see her and not feel an itching to be married?" "Belle Mignonne," he cries, "where are you going?" and after many frank expressions of his delight in the prospect of having her as his own, "Are not you glad of this marriage, my lovely pet?" the old fellow says. "Very glad indeed," says Dorimène, with equal candour; "the severity of my father has kept me in the most wearisome seclusion. How often have I fretted at the little liberty he gave me, and wished that he would get me a husband, that I might escape from the restraint in which I am with him, and find myself in a condition where I can do what I like!" She then proceeds to explain what she likes with perfect freedom. "I love play, visitors, assemblies, picnics, promenades," she cries—"in one word, all kinds of pleasure;" and she adds the expression of her comfortable assurance, that he will never be one of those inconvenient husbands who would like their wives to live like ghosts. "We will live together when we are married like two people who understand each other, and trouble our heads with no jealous suspicion. But what is the matter? you change countenance." Poor Sganarelle, who has listened with dismay to this too frank explanation, stammers forth a few words of apology, and his bride sails past him to buy her marriage clothes, and "get rid of these rags." "I am going straight to buy everything I want, and I will send the tradesmen to you," she adds; and she is scarcely gone

when Géronimo rushes on the stage to recommend a jeweller who has a fine diamond to sell, which he thinks his friend would like as a present for his bride. "There is no hurry about that," says Sganarelle. His countenance is as long and melancholy as a little while before it was gay; and when his friend, astonished, asks in his turn, What is the matter? he answers that he has begun to entertain some little scruples about his marriage. He has had a dream, and he wishes it explained to him. He dreamt he was in a ship, on a rough sea: but Géronimo makes an excuse—he has an engagement; he will hear no more, but recommends his friend to consult two philosophers who live close by. This Sganarelle proceeds at once to do.

And here we are plunged back again, either by taste or by purpose, into the familiar "business" of the old buffooneries. The scene which follows between Pancrace, the first metaphysician, and the discouraged and doubting bridegroom, is nothing but an enlargement of the farcical scene in the very first *canevas* constructed by Molière for his troupe more than a dozen years before —the 'Jalousie du Barbouillé.' Pancrace is again the well-known doctor of the Italian stage—the buffoon-philosopher of immemorial use, with no conceivable resemblance to any ordinary human creature. The scene is wonderfully amusing when well acted, but from every other point of view it is a mere piece of gay nonsense, and quite unlikely, so extravagant is it, to affect any known philosophy. The second philosopher, Marphurius, is less entirely beyond the reach of reason; but neither of them gives the exasperated Sganarelle the slightest advice, or will take any interest in his difficulties. He has then re-

course to a couple of dancing and singing gipsies, whose appearance is really the object of the whole piece, as it was under this guise that King Louis himself was to take part in the ballet. These wild oracles, however, treat him no better than the philosophers, and he is standing in a corner scratching his head and wondering what he is to do, when Dorimène again passes, escorted by an old lover, in answer to whose reproaches she declares still more frankly than before that she is marrying Sganarelle only for his money, and with the hope of finding herself soon his widow. This confidence, which he overhears, decides the doubting and trembling *bourgeois*. "Let us free ourselves of the business," he says to himself, knocking at the door of the Seigneur Alcantor, the noble father of the bride, not without great tremors as to how he is to be received. Alcantor, however, receives him with all the dignity of a noble father. "I am not a man to put force upon any one," he says. "You are engaged to marry my daughter, and all the preparations are made; but since you wish to withdraw, I will go and see what is to be done." "*Ma foi!*" cries Sganarelle, when this placable person leaves him, "I have done well to get myself out of it. He is far more reasonable than I expected." But this delightful relief does not last long. It is Alcidas, the son of Alcantor, who comes to give him the final answer, bringing, at the same time, two swords, of which, with all the politeness in the world, he begs Sganarelle to choose one. "For what use?" asks the astonished citizen. "Monsieur," answers Alcidas, "as you have refused to marry my sister, I don't think that you will find this little compliment out of place. Other people might

make a disturbance, but we are a family noted for managing things gently; and, with all civility, I wish you to know that, if you have no objection, we must now cut each other's throats." "Put your compliment back into its sheath," cries Sganarelle, alarmed. But he cannot escape either from the dilemma, or from the beating which the young fire-eater administers, always most politely, "with your permission." "Monsieur," he repeats, "I regret above everything to treat you so, but I must continue till you have either consented to fight me or to marry my sister." "I will marry her, I will marry her!" cries the discomfited Sganarelle; upon which the bride is led upon the stage by her noble father. "Here is her hand," says Alcantor. "Praised be heaven, I am free of the charge! and now it is you whom her conduct concerns. Let us all rejoice, and celebrate this happy marriage."

This is the light yet humorous framework of the play in which Sganarelle, in his normal state of puzzlement and comical dismay, suspicious and audacious, yet too great a coward to free himself, and driven, by his mingled shrewdness and folly, into all the troubles of a pantaloon, comes next before us—as amusing, as bewildered, as humorous in his gross delight, as downcast in his terrors, as he was in his first appearance. The new element which is introduced into the story—the mercenary meanness of the noble family and of the beautiful bride who cheerfully sells herself for the old citizen's money—will not escape the reader. Hitherto the young lady has been considered in the light of an innocent victim; but life was daily becoming more real to the dramatist, and his courage rising to a discussion of all its bitterness.

But it must not be forgotten, that neither this wealth of wit and mirth, nor the somewhat fierce blow of social satire above indicated, was the first object in the little play, which was, in fact, a mere occasion for the ballet, in which a party of gipsies, among whom the king himself intended to figure, were to perform their dance, two of them in female garb being charged with the answer to Sganarelle's questions. If any of the courtiers had been beguiled by Sganarelle into forgetting the real crisis and point of interest, here was the moment in which they were recalled to themselves. How curious is the scene, and to what ridicule the player could have turned it had he dared!—Molière himself, in the corner of the stage, gaping with open mouth as Sganarelle, trying to catch the prophecy he wants from the mouth of the gipsies who elude him; while in the front, all eyes are fixed on THE KING, solemnly capering before the ecstatic gaze of the Court, every member of which hung on his breath, and felt his smile to be life itself. At that moment, when all hearts were beating, what did any of the spectators care for Molière-Sganarelle, and his immortal fooling?—but the tables are turned now.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS MERIDIAN.

At this period of his career, Molière had reached the very height of prosperity and success. Under-currents of opposition might indeed have begun to rise against him, more serious than those inevitable rufflings of the popular tide which came from the vanities he had offended; but he could still afford to laugh at them, as he always could afford to defy them. The position he had secured was such that nothing could really injure him, notwithstanding that he had, like every other object of public adoration, a great deal of calumny and private slander to encounter. The strength of this position was, that he had both the king and the people on his side: a king whose authority was supreme, not only in public affairs, but in the more capricious world of fashion which is not always ruled by legitimate sovereigns; and a people too fond of being amused, too capable of enjoying the piquant fare set before it, to be lightly turned aside from its allegiance. The actor-dramatist had earned the right to laugh at his audience to their faces, and to open out the ridicules of their life at his pleasure; and the only man in the kingdom who

was safe from those dazzling shafts stood by his favourite with unvarying support and appreciation. Thus, but for the plaints of the fine ladies and fine gentlemen, which only added additional zest to the enjoyment of the rest of the world, all Paris joined in universal applause. The theatre answered to the severest test of success, and paid admirably, securing a liberal living for all the members of the troupe, and something more for its leader. He was able to fill his house with all the luxuries of his time,—fine furniture, works of art, splendid dress, and obsequious service. Though he was born a *bourgeois* he was as magnificent in his tastes as any *grand seigneur*, and liberal as a prince, giving largely to others,—one of the greatest pleasures of life to a man so organised. All this might have tempted a meaner man to indolence, or seduced a weaker man to complacence and compliance with the likings of his patrons. Had he been led away by royal flattery into a tinsel paradise of masques and ballets,—to arrange *entrées* in which the king himself did not disdain to dance, and frame mellifluous choruses or elegant dialogues for the finest personages in the world,—who could have wondered? But prosperity had a very different, a much more wonderful, effect upon Molière. He showed no disdain of the ballets, but served his magnificent prince in them with thorough goodwill and grace; but in the very midst of these fairy entertainments — amid naiads appearing out of water-lilies, and goddesses in gilded cars, and enchanted palaces brilliant in all the charms of coloured fire—suddenly, without a word of warning, this greatest of buffoons and most wonderful of jesters stood out in another aspect, like the inhabitant of a different world. The

crackling of the fireworks was not over nor the tinkling of the guitars; the *entrées* were not danced out—the king and his cavaliers were still in their Arcadian dress, paladins, princes of the fairy tale,—when at a caprice of their favourite actor, the servant of their pleasures, they were brought back and set face to face with one of the darkest mysteries of human life.

How did this strange caprice seize upon Molière? Why was he so changed,—the world all at once become so much more serious for him, its evils so much graver, its lies more cruel? But this is a question which it is not easy to answer. In the days when life itself was hard,—when he had to struggle against poverty and obscurity, fighting his way from one town to another, to amuse one rustic crowd after another, conciliating a village *maire*, enchanted to secure the favour of the chamberlain of a prince,—no such gloomy view of human nature had ever seized him. He had waged war lightly with the gay follies of his time, and had gained an easy victory over them, even in the first portion of his life in Paris. The quarrels of a pair of lovers, the mystifications of a clever trickster, the ludicrous mistakes of a simpleton, had furnished his audience with simple laughter. Now, what was the meaning of the change? The world seems all at once to have widened and to have darkened around him. The coils become more deeply laid, the solemn follies which are vicious and fatal, seem suddenly to have caught and absorbed him. Perhaps it was simply the consequence of fully matured powers, and of the security of a position in which he dared say all that he would, and was no longer obliged to strain every nerve for the amusement of the crowd. But the changed

mood, which in the very height of his success produced 'Tartuffe,' the 'Festin de Pierre,' and the 'Misanthrope' —works which are more tragic than comic, and without which the higher side of his genius would have remained undeveloped—is very mysterious:—so strange that it is scarcely possible to believe that there did not exist some private seed of bitterness, some newly acquired insight into the false and the cruel, to account for the sombre yet splendid alteration. From the beginning, moments of gravity had occurred to him, gleams of deeper feeling, such as those which failed of due expression in his one serious and romantic comedy, 'Don Garcie de Navarre'; and these had been intensified in the later creation of Arnolphe, in which, notwithstanding the odiousness of the character, Molière had sometimes trembled on the verge of passion. This has been attributed not unnaturally to the rising of a doubt that his own experiment in marriage had been a dangerous one,—and to a dawning conviction that love on one side, however impassioned, does not always secure love on the other. But however much such a personal feeling may have moved Molière in the treatment of an imaginary personage placed in his own position, it could not have given him the sudden tragic apprehension of falsehood all about which seems to have seized upon him in the midst of his wellbeing and success, —falsehood in religion, falsehood in learning, pretended science, feigned love, false friendship, falseness everywhere. The later part of his life from this period onwards is little more than a determined assault, now tragically grave, now gay as in his most careless days, on the lies and treacheries and false assumptions of life.

As for the unquestionable suffering in which Molière was soon involved, by the levity and misconduct of his

young wife, there is as yet no evidence that his troubles in this respect had begun. When Armande made her appearance on the stage, not very long after her marriage, in the 'Critique de l'École des Femmes,' the part of the witty and gracefully-mocking Élise was confided to her; and the very description of this character, "*satirique spirituelle*," suggests a flattering adaptation of the *rôle* to the grace and vivacity of the young member of the troupe, who had been trained under Molière's own eye, and whose charm, in his estimation, never failed. A little later, when she appeared under her own name in the 'Impromptu,' the few sentences of dialogue which pass between her husband and herself give us no impression of grievance on his side or of cruel levity on hers. She complains gaily, when he calls her to order in his capacity as manager, that he would not have so addressed her eighteen months before,—just the kind of laughing reproach which a happy young wife, still confident of her power, would address to a husband. It is impossible to believe that at this time there was any coldness, suspicion, or serious estrangement between them.

And by way of confirming and assuring his prosperity, the connection of the great comedian with Louis XIV. had by this time been increased by Molière's resumption of the family appointment of *valet de chambre tapissier*, which he had given up all pretension to, presumedly on behalf of his next brother, when he adopted the stage as his profession. The brother died in 1660, and old Poquelin, the father, who had retained the office through all these years, was probably no longer very fit for its duties. And very likely Molière himself was not sorry to take back an appointment which increased his chances of personal intercourse with the king, not to say that

it was doubly expedient, now that he was himself a father, to keep the post in the family. At all events there is indisputable evidence that he did resume and perform the duties of the office,—duties of no very dignified kind, according to the ideas of later days. This fact makes his daring assault upon the *Fâcheux* of the Court—"*les Marquis*," whom he had so often held up to public ridicule—more wonderful still; and it can hardly be wondered at if these wounded butterflies, when they met their satirist in their own peculiar world of the Court, should have tried their best to sting him in their turn. We get in this way the strangest glimpses of the great dramatist. On one occasion when he presented himself to make (which was one of his duties) the bed of the king, "another *valet de chambre*, whose duty it was to make the bed with him, declined to do so, rudely declaring that it was beneath his dignity to do his service along with a comedian." Another courtier, however, of a more enlightened sort, stepped in to Molière's aid. This was a "M. Bellocq, a man of intelligence, and a writer of graceful verses." "M. de Molière," he said, "may I have the honour of making the king's bed with you?" To see these two laced and ribboned figures, in their great perukes and gorgeous coats, bowing over the king's bed, smoothing its sheets and arranging its embroidered pillows like a couple of chambermaids,—how curious is the scene! Another time it is the king himself who is driven to atone for the insolence of his noble lackeys.

"The officials of the privy chamber showed by many acts of contempt how much it annoyed them to be obliged to eat at the same table with Molière, who was *valet de chambre* to

the king, because he was a comedian—treatment which made that celebrated man withdraw from it altogether. Louis XIV. hearing this, determined to interfere, in order to put an end to outrages which ought not to have been addressed to one of the greatest men of genius of his age. Accordingly he addressed Molière one morning at the hour of the *petit lever*. 'I hear that you are badly entertained, M. de Molière, and that my people don't find you good enough to eat with them. Perhaps you are hungry. I myself awoke with a very good appetite this morning. Sit down here and try my *en cas de nuit*' [a provision made in the evening in case the royal appetite might suddenly require satisfaction in the middle of the night]. Then the king, cutting a chicken, and ordering Molière to seat himself, helped him to a wing and took one for himself, giving orders that those who had the *entrées* at this hour, and who were the most remarkable and favoured personages in Court, might be admitted. 'You see,' the king said to them, 'that I am making Molière eat something, for my *valets de chambre* don't find him good enough company for them.' From that moment, it is added, Molière had no longer any need to present himself at the common table: the entire Court hastened to send him invitations."

The remark of M. Sainte-Beuve upon this curious episode will commend itself to most readers. "Did this reparation make up to the proud man offended for the insult?" he says. Was it not rather an additional wound to his natural dignity to have the wrong which he no doubt scorned, even while mortified by it, set thus in full light of day by the arbitrary amends of the king? The greatest genius France had produced, a man whose name survives a hundred generations of marquises, what was he, after all, beside those ruffled and furbelowed descendants of the Crusaders?—a nobody, an intruder into their higher world, an upstart who had no right to handle the king's sheets, or stand in his semi-divine presence.

This was absolutely true from the point of view of the marquises, however a Grand Monarque might choose out of his caprice to interfere; and it is quite as true to-day as in the days of Molière. That amid all his more serious satires he should have so seldom assailed this ineradicable folly of human nature, this pre-eminence of rank over all personal qualities, shows either great magnanimity or the most superlative pride on Molière's part. Perhaps, as he seems to have been born with all the qualities of a *grand seigneur*, his forbearance is a sign of the latter quality—that intensest pride which will not allow that it has been, or could be, offended by any folly of its inferiors.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the effect produced upon the world of Paris, at that time so full of intellectual life—not so much, perhaps, by the 'École des Femmes,' which was little more than a means of raising the tempest—as by the bold stand made by Molière in his own defence,—his immediate acceptance of the challenge thrown vaguely enough at him by his critics in general, and the savage reprisals into which he was hurried by the development of individual attacks. A whole fountain of literature bubbled up like a geyser, hot and foaming, tossing its spray to the very clouds. 'Contre-Critiques de l'École des Femmes,' 'Impromptus de l'Hôtel de Condé,' and many other forgotten pieces, kept the coteries of Paris and Versailles in agitation, and every kind of slander was directed against the too successful dramatist, who managed still to have the laugh on his side, as well as right and justice. None of all these attacks seem to have harmed Molière with either the king or the public; but one, at least, must have rankled in his mind; and there seems little doubt

that the exasperation produced in him by the reproach of impiety and an intention on his part to assail religion, had a great share in directing his next and most blighting stroke of satire. It is not without a certain shock and pang that we realise the possibility that in this great assault upon hypocrisy it might be the sect of Port-Royal—the party of Pascal and the Arnaulds—whom the great satirist had in view. Tartuffe is not marked with any special sign of party. His casuistries recall those Jesuit doctrines which Pascal, with scarcely less satirical power and equal brilliancy, had, a few years before, held up to the odium of the world in the 'Lettres Provinciales,' rather than the austere virtues of the Jansenist party. But yet it must not be forgotten that the Port-Royalists were the Puritans of the time; and the sanctimonious layman who made of himself a kind of amateur spiritual director to the too simple and credulous citizen, no doubt bore, in outward form at least, a greater resemblance to this anxiously devout and self-denying sect, than to the more orthodox devotee whose religious observances were kept in the ordinary beaten way of the Church's rules. And it is quite consistent with the temper of Molière to have chosen his type of hypocrisy out of the new ranks of the reforming party—that party which based its entire authority upon an assertion of the degradation and debasement of existing institutions, thereby implying a claim to superior insight and purity on its own part. But though the presumption in favour of this idea is strengthened by the approbation of the Pope's legate and several of the higher clergy, which he made haste to secure for his work, there are in reality no party features in

Molière's hypocrite. He is the false devotee of all and every party—the pretender to virtue, the incarnation of falsehood in the guise of religion. No type of evil has been so constantly and so bitterly assailed: the hypocrite is the property of the satirist, the favourite victim of all caricature which goes beyond the mirth of the moment. Humanity justly feels that no falsehood is so odious as that which is capable of putting a stigma on goodness, and giving to piety an aspect which is hideous or revolting; and there are few prejudices so deeply rooted in the common mind as that which gives all the attributes of the hypocrite to religious severity in every form.

Of all the causes which could have roused Molière to the vehemence of wrath that produced 'Tartuffe,' we find none so likely as the whispered insinuations against himself as a profane assailant of goodness, which had undoubtedly arisen at this period. No other study had ever come from his hands so pitilessly or so carefully worked out. There is no laugh in his eyes as he elaborates the gloomy picture, though there may be a stern smile about his lips. The pencil is as sharp in his hand as the point of a dagger. The play, for which (after the first moment, when no one knew what was coming) he had to force a public hearing by the obstinate persistence of passion, comes upon us with a shock of surprise even now, in the midst of all his genial comedy, as it did to the astonished audience upon which it burst like a clap of thunder. The laughing genius of the stage has turned all at once into a stern teacher, almost a prophet. It is as if a sudden revelation of the darker side of human character had burst upon him. The follies which evoke more mirth than

disapproval in him have had their day,— their meed of open laughter never cruel, scarcely even unkind. Fine ladies and fine gentlemen, even the Marquis himself, was but a kind of foolish brother after all; and his vanity, his finery, his affectations, even his insolence, what were they but errors of weakness and childish imperfection? But suddenly it has dawned upon the laughing critic that here is something worse: that a lie is inhuman, it is Evil incarnate, the real antichrist, the enemy of everything that is good. Whatsoever the influences were that roused him to this moral passion, they must have produced a real awakening—a realisation of something against which all strife must be to the death. They changed even the character of his mind, altered the aspect of everything round him. During three or four successive years, in which his genius reached its culminating point, Molière stands before us with an altered aspect,—no longer a jester, rather a Quixote, melancholy, serious, sometimes bitter, penetrated by a horror and scorn of falsehood wheresoever found.

We have already indicated briefly the circumstances in which this, the first of his grave works—and the most grave of all his works—was, in part, presented to the world. The Court of Versailles was in full *fête* in May of the year 1664—in the highest celebration of that mingled pomp, splendour, gaiety, and absurdity, which distinguished the great entertainments of the age. This was a feast of a week long: "a succession of all the fancies that could charm the eyes and ears; disguises, cavalcades, riding at the ring; concerts, vocal and instrumental; recital of verses; splendid repasts, served by Laughters, Sports, and Delights; comedies, mingled with

singing and dancing; ballets, transformation-scenes, fireworks, illuminations, races, lotteries, collations,—an entire week passed outside of ordinary life in the regions of fairyland." The performers in this series of splendid follies were the most illustrious personages in France; the playwright-in-chief was the Duc de Saint-Aignan; the most distinguished performer Louis XIV. himself, a young and handsome lover, in all the first *éclat* of his successes and splendour. "At a distance, and as a kind of reserve to aid the efforts of the noble actors, was the auxiliary troupe of the Palais Royal, with Molière at its head." When the day had passed in all these delights—in the imaginary "Palace of Alcina," where the "pleasures of the enchanted island" were shared by all that crowd of privileged and beautiful and noble spectators—(among them the Magdalen of the age, that sensitive, penitent Louise de la Vallière, for whose sake all this gaiety, so little congenial to her, was concerted) — "an outdoor theatre was thrown open, lighted by a thousand tapers and torches," at the word of "the paladin Roger," who was no other than the king himself: in which all the masquers in their glittering costumes took their places, with the sky overhead, to listen to such a comedy as suited the occasion. Molière had woven in all haste the little romance of the 'Princess d'Élide' to please the revellers; and though there is nothing in the light little drama to make it worth remembering as his work, it was very well proportioned to the necessity of the moment, being the story of a lover's stratagem to win, by a pretence of indifference, the heart of a haughty princess disgusted by too much wooing. The songs with which the piece was interspersed—the pretty groupings of the

dancers—the pretty and vivacious actress who played the chief part—were, even without the appearance of the great comedian himself, entertainment enough for the gay Court in all its finery. The first act of the little piece was in verse—which is the full-dress of the drama in France; but French verse is too elaborate a medium for hasty composition, and the author was compelled to resort to more homely prose for the completion of the hurried work. "Comedy," it was said, "had here time only to put on one of her buskins, and had shown her obedience to the royal command by appearing with one foot bare." On a second evening, the 'Fâcheux' was given in the same manner, on the same open-air stage.

Then came the crown of the entertainment. After a great lottery in the afternoon, by which the young king distributed to all his favourites, present and to come, a profusion of royal gifts, the revellers, growing weary, assembled once more, music playing, soft airs of early summer blowing about the thousand flames of the wax-lights, the green *bosquets* rustling in early verdure; and when the curtain rose, saw, not the pretty, fantastic wooing of a princess of fairy-land—not the gay copy of their own vanities—but the sudden apparition, as out of another world, of a good man deceived, a disturbed family, an oppressed house, the sombre and ill-omened figure, like a raven, shabbily clothed and frowning, of the Hypocrite. A greater contrast to all that perfumed and laughing crowd could not be conceived; and there is something in the grim irony of the encounter which is almost appalling. It would not seem, however, strangely enough, that the audience—"the paladin Roger."

and all his surrounding knights, and the ladies over whom their exaggerated graces, their super-dainty compliments and fine presents had an absorbing influence—were in any way specially struck by the sudden opening of this door into all things tragic and terrible. It was only a new play of Molière's to those who were spoiled by the possession of so great a slave at their constant disposal. Most likely, the gallants and the fine ladies thought the 'Princess d'Élide' much prettier. The scolding old woman in the first act—the uninteresting husband—scarcely even a whiff of a love-story to give excitement to the plot—must have appeared to them poor fare enough after the burning of Alcina's enchanted palace, which had taken place so lately, and all the palpitations of the lottery, in which they had, or had not, got what they most desired. And the royal and noble actors, no doubt, were pre-occupied by the success of their own appearances, their dances and changes of costumes—the play in the evening being only part of the show, and by no means the part which set most hearts beating. Nobody probably was aware, in that fine assembly, that what they had listened to was more remarkable than usual. Loret, the rhyming chronicler of events, who has been already quoted, announces that the "moral comedy" of the Hypocrite was "of great merit," and pleased the Court greatly; but of all who were then present, no one else seems to have made any special comments on the new creation.

Very soon, however, this calm was broken. Society outside the Court was thinking of something else than masques and ballets, lotteries and enchanted islands. It was torn asunder by religious disputations, every drawing-

room having its controversies, its party standard, its passionate partisanship for orthodoxy or Jansenism. The rumour would seem to have risen at once that Molière, whose dauntless attacks had already touched so many, had now openly assaulted religion; and so warm and sudden was the outcry, that the Court itself, which had perceived nothing extraordinary in the play, was roused and alarmed by the echo which it raised. When the record of the revels of the Enchanted Island was published, this clamour had risen to such a height that the king himself had been obliged to interfere. Louis saved his favourite player from the general commotion in a way which gave little satisfaction to Molière—by sacrificing the play. In the official history of the royal amusements, amid all the tale of fireworks and minuets, occurs the following notice: "Although the comedy which the Sieur de Molière had made against hypocrites was extremely entertaining, the king perceived so much resemblance between those whom a true devotion leads on into the road to heaven, and those whom vain ostentation of good works does not hinder from committing evil actions, that his extreme sensitiveness could not bear this likening of vice to virtue, so that one might be taken for the other; and although he had no doubt of the good intention of the author, he has forbidden its representation in public, and deprived himself of this pleasure that it may not be abused by others less capable of discerning its real meaning."

It is difficult to tell whether Molière in the first beginning regarded his new play with different eyes from those with which he contemplated its predecessors, or in any way attached a deeper importance to it. The manner in

which he produced it does not seem to betray any distinct consciousness on his part that he was taking a new step in his career; unless, perhaps, the fact that he gave it for representation while still incomplete may be considered a proof that he was conscious of higher merit in it than in any of his previous productions. The prohibition, however, evidently annoyed and irritated him more than any other check he had yet received, and he would seem to have struggled passionately against it for years, until, after many rebellious attempts to elude or ignore it, he finally succeeded in getting it annulled. This, however, was not done till long after the original appearance of the piece; and in the meantime, the lively Parisian world, stimulated by opposition, was seized with such a curiosity about the forbidden play, that a new kind of private performance seems to have been invented for its gratification and the satisfaction of the author. Molière went from one house to another to read the play which he was forbidden to put on the stage. The Pope's legate was the first to profit by this private indulgence,—there being no doubt, we presume, of his power of discernment; and as a proof that the king had no personal objection to it, 'Tartuffe' was again privately performed before him at his brother's house at Villers-Cotterets in September. Even the most serious portion of the great world seems to have emulated the frivolous in curiosity; and we are told of one eager assembly in a drawing-room, upon which a friend of the house broke in, in great excitement, as Molière was beginning to read. "What! Madame," cried the intruder, to the hostess, "you are about to listen to a comedy on the day when the mystery of iniquity is accomplished

—when our mothers are taken from us!" It was the day on which the Port-Royal nuns were ejected from their abbey. From the legate to this Jansenist drawing-room the range is large. "Everybody tried to secure Molière, to hear him recite it," Boileau tells us, than whom no one could know better. "It was the greatest pleasure that could be procured for any party of fine people," says Moland. The great world ran wild over this secret and forbidden pleasure from which the vulgar were entirely shut out.

While the suppressed play was thus attracting the attention of the superior classes, and bringing little conspirator-groups together in every distinguished *salon* in Paris, another play of equal importance in Molière's history—the second of his three great *chefs-d'œuvre*—stole quietly into being. Without sound of trumpet or any special note of interest, in the beginning of the year 1665—the year after the introduction of 'Tartuffe'—the 'Festin de Pierre' was played in the theatre of the Palais Royal. It does not appear to have had either royal patronage or excitement of public interest in its favour. Less sombre, gloomy, and terrible than its immediate predecessor, but, at the same time, less realistic than anything that went before it, this great comedy received no such homage from the world as Molière's previous works had obtained; nor has it ever, we believe, caught the popular fancy. Up to this moment the general reader knows less of it than of almost any of Molière's productions. Even such a critic as Voltaire was of opinion that it was written only to satisfy Molière's troupe, who were determined not to be left behind by the other theatres in Paris,

each of which had one version or another of the legend of Don Juan in hand. It seems incredible that such an idea could be entertained by any competent intelligence. Nothing that Molière ever produced bears stronger evidence of the maturity of genius and power. The connection, perhaps too fine to strike the vulgar, between the bold and splendid impersonation of absolute cynicism and unbelief,—the magnificent dare-devil who believes neither in God nor man, and mocks and defies both—and the hypocrite who veils his vices under a sanctimonious pretence of piety,—is very evident to the eye of the student, and gives a wonderful grandeur to the double conception. Molière sounds the entire depths of moral depravity between these two wonderful impersonations. The bold infidel is the natural successor, as he is the apparent opposite, of the pious impostor. What little grace of courage he has is due to the ineffable meanness of the other—the wretch who tries to shield his own corruption in the shadow of holiness. He who scoffs openly at virtue, as he does at all divine authority and human law, comes naturally after the exaggerated devotee who breaks all laws under pretence of obeying them more perfectly than other men. Thus there is a wonderful sequence between the two, and the one is wanted to measure the full tale of the iniquity of the other. Contemporary critics did not see this aspect of Don Juan. They were not even sufficiently advanced in their art to understand that a writer does not necessarily identify himself with his hero, or that Molière might be able to set forth the audacious impiety of the bold profligate without sharing in it, as certainly as he could paint the hideous falsehood of the pretender. As they are,

they stand before the world the most finished and terrible pictures of the pretended worshipper and the heartless and cynical scoffer which have ever been exhibited. Such blighting and terrible art was not in the nobler and grander imagination of Shakespeare, and we know no other with whom to compare the Frenchman in these his highest efforts. They have remained since then, for all the educated world, the chief impersonations of the hypocrite who insults God and the profligate who defies Him. What can all description, all denunciation, do to stigmatise an impostor, that will be half so effectual as to call him a Tartuffe? and what other model of heartless and dauntless vice is so instantly understood as Don Juan? To be sure, in the latter case the image has been taken out of the original possessor's hands, diluted and sentimentalised by no less a genius than that of Byron; and clothed in other robes, as splendid in their way, but veiling the grander proportions of the primal figure, by Mozart. But neither of these great artists has equalled the first conception of this gay and magnificent and terrible hero which Molière brought out of the chaos and childish morality of the legend—a being without hope or fear, without heart or faith or honour.

As, however, we shall enter more fully into the details of these great plays in our next chapter, it is unnecessary to do more than record their history here. It seems incomprehensible that so wonderful a production as the 'Festin de Pierre' should have met with the most complete failure of any of Molière's works, except perhaps 'Don Garcie.' "It disappeared from the stage," Moland says, "after the fifteenth represen-

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tation,"—never was printed in Molière's lifetime, and did not indeed see the light "in its integrity" till so late a period as 1819,—more than a century and a half after its creation! Few things are so unaccountable as these caprices of popular favour. Several other versions of 'Don Juan' were being played in Paris, in which the stony figure of the Commander held the principal part; and how were an audience whose minds were preoccupied by that supernatural appearance to have time to think of the hero, unnecessarily adorned with so much character and force—or to listen to the fine contrast of Sganarelle's shrewd and keen, yet confused and poltroon philosophy, with his master's crushing wit and superb indifference to all moral considerations—while all its faculties were bent upon the coming of this supernatural personage, and the inevitable catastrophe? Hamlet himself would fall into the background if the chief actor who fixed everybody's attention was the Ghost. On the other hand, those who found in 'Tartuffe' an attack upon true religion, found in the 'Festin de Pierre' a shameless avowal of infidel principles. The one accusation was as just as the other, and about as true.

If, however, there rose a certain bitterness in Molière's mind when he found one of his best works suppressed by authority, and the other squashed by popular disapproval or indifference, it would not be wonderful. It is scarcely conceivable that he could be unaware of the intrinsic excellence of these two dramas, which are a world above anything he had ever attempted before. Strangely enough, the one which we might have supposed most dear to its author—the one in which he had intro-

duced his own character of Sganarelle in its most subtle development, with a new strain of wisdom and force crossing and mingling with the *bourgeois* compliance, cowardice, and bewilderment from which he was accustomed to draw so much effect—is the one which he allowed to drop; while with a perseverance which went the length of obstinacy, he kept 'Tartuffe' persistently in the foreground, and at last found a hearing for his hypocrite, notwithstanding all opposition.

In the meantime, while he was under the influence of this double disappointment, other troubles were gathering round him. It seems to be almost certain that the great *fêtes* at Versailles, in the midst of which 'Tartuffe' was so strangely and suddenly presented to the world, were the occasion of Armande Molière's first serious breach with her husband. The usually accepted story of her first infidelities has been much discredited by the researches of the critic, who has proved that two of the lovers about whom the story is told were absent from France at this period, and absolutely out of reach of the woman who is said to have been corrupted by them. But however the details may fail in correctness, it is easily credible that the licence of the week's riot may have proved fatal to the flighty young woman, trained in no school of moral purity, and who now tasted the first delights of flattery and success. She had played the part of the Princess d'Élide at these prolonged revels, and had attracted great admiration. Her beauty, though that was far from perfect, her grace and wit, the "engaging manners," the "charm which insinuates itself into all hearts" which her husband had attributed to her, had procured her a "real triumph." That she should

have been carried away by the flattery and excitement was too probable. It is no business of ours to enter into the story; enough that the middle-aged husband, who adored her through all her follies, was made miserable by them,—and while never ceasing to love her, was compelled at last to vindicate his own honour by a kind of separation, which is of itself one of the highest proofs of tenderness and mercy which a man could show. He did not cast her out from his house, young as she was and surrounded by dangerous friends, and traditions not tending towards purity,—he was too merciful to cast her forth into the depraved world where vice of this description was the rule, and virtue a rare and exceptional phenomenon. He allowed her to retain the shelter and protection of his roof. "For several years they lived separate lives, although always occupying the same house, and saw each other only in the theatre." How strange an aggravation of the inevitable sufferings of such a calamity this close neighbourhood must have been it is needless to say. The position is most touching as well as terrible.

A very remarkable account of a conversation in which Molière declared the state of his own feelings at this painful crisis is to be found in an abominable publication called 'La Fameuse Comédienne,' and professing to be a biography of Armande, which has been condemned at once for its vileness and slanderous intention by all the critics. "Nevertheless," says Moland, "the private sufferings of the poet are, in some passages, expressed with a justice of tone and a ring of truth which, after this long interval, no new narrative could pretend to." And however suspicious may

be the quarter from which the following pathetic self-explanation is brought, it is almost impossible not to accept the internal evidence of its truth. Molière was walking sadly in the garden of his country house at Auteuil, according to this account, when he was joined by his friend Chapelle, his old schoolfellow and intimate associate of years. Chapelle, finding his friend more troubled than usual, asked what was the matter; to which Molière replied sadly,—"ashamed of showing so little fortitude in respect to a misfortune so fashionable,"—that it was the conduct of his wife and the state of the relations between them which distressed him. Chapelle, like a true man of the world, rallied his friend upon his weakness, and expressed his astonishment that a man like Molière, "who had painted so well the weakness of others," should thus fail to himself,—with many other arguments likely enough to come from the lips of a man of fashion in the time of Louis Quatorze. The inexpressible melancholy, shame, and tenderness, the pity and sad toleration of what follows, will go to the reader's heart:—

"Molière, who had listened quietly enough, here interrupted his friend to ask him if he had ever been in love. 'Yes,' said Chapelle, 'as much as a man of good sense ought to be; but I should never have made difficulties about anything that my honour required of me, and I blush to find you so undecided.' 'I see that you have never yet loved,' said Molière; 'you have taken the appearance of love for love itself. . . . To answer you concerning the perfect knowledge of the heart of man which you say I possess by the portraits which I exhibit every day, I allow that I have studied as much as I could its weakness; but if my knowledge has taught me that some fly from the danger, my

experience shows that it is impossible to avoid it altogether. I judge by myself. I was born with so much inclination towards tenderness, that finding it impossible to overcome the disposition, . . . I endeavoured to make myself as happy in loving as may be possible to a sensitive heart. . . . I determined that the innocence of my choice should secure my happiness. I took my wife, so to speak, from the cradle ; I brought her up with care. . . . I persuaded myself that I could inspire her with sentiments which time should not destroy, and I neglected nothing to attain this end. As she was still very young when I married her, I saw no evil inclinations in her, and I believed myself a little less unfortunate than most of those who come under similar engagements. Neither did I give up my cares after marriage ; but I found so much indifference in her that I began to perceive that all my precautions had been useless, and that the feeling she had for me was very far from that which I had desired to make me happy. . . . I then took the resolution to live with her like an honest man who has a coquette for his wife, and is convinced, whatever may be said, that his reputation does not depend upon the bad conduct of his wife. But I had the pain of seeing that a person without great beauty, who owes the little wit she has to the education which I gave her, was able in a moment to destroy all my philosophy. Her presence made me forget all my resolutions, and the first words she said in her own defence left me so convinced that my suspicions were without foundation, that I begged her pardon for having been so credulous. However, my kindness has had no effect upon her. I determined then to live with her as if she were not my wife ; but if you knew what I suffer you would pity me. My passion has risen to such a height that it goes the length of entering with sympathy even into her concerns ; and when I consider how impossible it is for me to overcome my love for her, I say to myself that she may have the same difficulty in subduing her inclinations, and I feel accordingly more disposed to pity her than to blame her. You will tell me that to love in this way is

folly; but for my part I believe there is only one kind of love, and that those who have not experienced feelings like these have never truly loved. Everything is connected with her in my heart. My mind is so full of her that in her absence nothing pleases me. When I see her, my emotion, and those sentiments which one can feel but cannot express, take away from me all power of thought. I have no eye for her faults, but only for that which is excellent in her. Is not this the last degree of folly? and do you not wonder that all the reason I have serves only to make me aware of my weakness without giving me the power to triumph over it?'"

After listening to the heart-rending avowal of the poet's poor attempt at philosophy, Molière's friend, confounded by an anguish beyond his conception, goes away saddened and silenced, incapable of further levity;—and this glimpse into a heart wrung and bleeding is as touching as anything we know in literature. If it was not Molière who spoke, it must have been nothing less than genius which put such words into his lips. This was the condition of mind which produced the 'Misanthrope,' the last and most interesting of the three great works which make this portion of his life—its crown of pain and passion—so remarkable. 'Tartuffe' was written in 1664, the 'Festin de Pierre' in 1665, and the 'Misanthrope' in 1666. Save Shakespeare, we know no writer of modern times who has produced anything which can be placed beside these works, so closely following each other,—and Molière does not reach the height of Shakespeare. Yet it is only with the greatest dramatic poet of the modern world that we can compare him in this full flower and climax of his genius.

The 'Misanthrope' stands by itself among Molière's

productions. In all the others, the chief personage of the piece is invariably the object of satire, the chief point of attack, the criminal or ludicrous figure which it is his purpose to hold up to our derision, scorn, or hatred, exhibiting it in its different aspects by all manner of lightning-gleams or comic illuminations. Both the odious Tartuffe and the splendid Juan occupy this position;—our sympathy is never invited for them. If the courage and magnificent recklessness of the latter sometimes attract us in spite of ourselves, it is in spite of the author too, who has no desire to recommend his desperate hero to us. They are so placed before us that their vices may be indisputable; that no illusion may be possible, that we may perceive from the beginning how false is the cloak of gloomy virtue, and how equally false the more dazzling mantle of pleasure, which the betrayer of woman, the scorner of man, the scoffer at God, wears so jauntily. But the Misanthrope is a sad and noble figure of heroic mould, claiming all our sympathies. He is no vulgar man-hater, no disbeliever in humanity, no natural cynic, taking a pleasure in bitterness, but one who hates only out of the fervour of indignant and wounded love—a man who feels all the foundations of the earth sapped around him by universal falsehood, and who for this reason has lost all pleasure in his life. Alceste has been compared with much justice to Hamlet, whom he does not equal in grandeur of conception, but whom he exceeds in fiery force of suffering and bitterness of personal anguish. The world in which the one is driven wild by all the little lies of society and the great lies of human misrule, culminating in the falseness of the woman which gives a double

sting to every other deception, is smaller, pettier, and less noble than that vast sphere of heaven and earth in which the other stands and gazes at the ruin round him with a sense of failure and confusion too greatly tragic to make passion possible, or human love any more than one of the flowers crushed in the rending of the earthquake and the awful indifference of the skies. The eyes of Alceste are not enlightened by the exceptional horror of a great crime, but by the common wrongs of every day, the stings of individual treachery; and he is consequently more angry, more keenly and personally wounded, and far more bitter than Hamlet, labouring with the great misery of the universe, is capable of being. The contemplative passion which makes it such a cursed spite to be born to set things right in such a world, is very different from the angry despair which can find a refuge in the desert—in separation from the miserable race, which to Hamlet has still a thousand claims of pity and interest, of awed and saddened love. But yet Alceste in his keen personal pangs, in his bitter indignation and scorn, in the relentings that make him still capable of being deceived, is perhaps the only version of Hamlet possible to the genius whose world was Paris. He holds the place in that brilliant and bustling, depraved and artificial scene—amid its picturesque and crowded streets, its eager and restless multitudes, its epigrams, its scandals, its wisdom and wit—which the other does in the world. Shakespeare was no more Hamlet than he was Othello or Lear; but Molière, if not in all points Alceste, breathes all his soul of profound and personal suffering into his hero. When the veil is lifted and we see the sad and passionate eyes

of the actor-dramatist looking out under the curls of the courtly Misanthrope upon the cruel coquetries and petulant graces of the Célimène who was Armande, the junction of the true and the fictitious is too keen even for that painful pleasure which is in tragedy. Still as we read we seem to be not reading but looking on, —"assisting," as the French say, at a scene of living anguish. The two who played these parts were husband and wife—living in the same house, bearing the same name, yet never meeting except upon the stage, where he was the outraged and derided lover, and she the false and heartless mistress. The great and tragic "comedy" leaves the region of art and comes into that of life when we realise the personages in it. Never before or since, so far as we are aware, has such a combination taken place in literature; and the reader who turns to the 'Misanthrope' with that exposition of its author's personal feelings which we have quoted in his hand, can scarcely fail to have his heart wrung with a sympathy going quite beyond the superficial emotion which attends fictitious distresses. Molière in the garden at Auteuil, sadly walking amid the formal parterres, answering to the half-mocking friendliness of his visitor, who had loved too after his fashion, but "no more than reason," as much "as a man of common-sense ought to love," in the following words: "I believe there is but one kind of love, and that those have never truly loved who have not felt like this,"—is the greatest of all commentators upon his own most tragic work.

After having thus given an account of the origin of the three great plays, we will now do what we can to place them before the reader.

CHAPTER V.

THE THREE GREAT COMEDIES.

REFERENCE has been already made to the struggle which Molière had to go through on account of 'Tartuffe.' The first three Acts at least, if not the whole of the play, were written in May 1664, but it was not until 1669 that, with the sanction of the king and law, it was openly represented in Paris. The various chances of its fate between whiles are almost amusing to trace now, though evidently they were far from amusing to the author, whose determined obstinacy in respect to this play contrasts strongly with his ready acceptance of the popular verdict upon its successor. After what we may call the private success which it attained when read by the dramatist in all the most distinguished houses in Paris, it was apparently laid aside perforce until 1667, when, in consequence of the war in Flanders, Paris was deserted completely by the great world; and all eyes being directed to the seat of war, and the public mind apparently too much occupied by the Grand Monarque's victories to take any violent notice of a theatrical performance, Molière attempted a stolen march upon his enemies, and suddenly produced his favourite play with various small

changes, calling it the 'Impostor,' and changing the name of the chief personage from Tartuffe to Panulphe,—a simple artifice which has a certain schoolboy innocence about it. But the devotees who felt themselves attacked were not to be taken by surprise. Their watchfulness had never relaxed, and the very morning after this semi-clandestine representation, all the paraphernalia of the law was set in motion, and the repetition of the play was at once forbidden. The reader will recollect that the king, though forbidding the public production of 'Tartuffe,' had permitted it to be played privately before him in the autumn of the year in which it was written; and the year after, by way of softening his refusal to remove this prohibition, he had given a public proof of his undiminished regard for Molière by changing the title of his troupe from that of the *Comédiens de Monsieur* to that of the *Comédiens du Roi*, thus taking them under his own special protection. Encouraged no doubt by this evidence of the king's favour, and moved by annoyance and disgust at his renewed failure, Molière, upon this second check, took the daring step of sending two members of the troupe after Louis to his camp under the walls of Lille, to procure if possible his authoritative interference. "It is very certain, sire," he wrote, with a querulous half-threat, which is sufficiently strange in the circumstances, and which reminds us of the obstinacy of a spoiled child determined to have its will, "that it is needless to expect me to make comedies if the Tartuffes are to have the advantage." Whether or not this petulant menace had any effect upon the king, it is impossible to say. He received La Thorillière and La Grange very graciously, but gave them an evasive answer, and Molière did not

venture again to reproduce 'Tartuffe.' Very shortly after, he himself withdrew for several months from the stage, —either out of bad health or irritated temper, it is not known which. Moland conjectures that it was the latter, and quotes a striking passage from the new play of 'Amphitryon' (written about this time, but not calling for very special notice), which he describes as at once "a complaint and a confession," in which the dramatist speaks somewhat bitterly of the pains of servitude, which are greater in the houses of the great than in those of the small, and complains that twenty years of assiduous service "is treated as nothing." He had, however, full time to recover from his ill-humour, if ill-humour it was; and his perseverance was at last rewarded.

It seems strange that the opposition to this, one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of Molière's works, should have been so inveterate,—since religion itself was in no manner attacked, but only that false semblance of religion and mock sanctity which has made the name of Tartuffe[1] a byword in all Europe.

Hypocrisy, whether in religious or in other matters, is unfortunately so much a vice of all ages and countries, and has been so often held up to execration, that it would

[1] Molière always wrote the word with two *f*'s, but it should properly be written with one *f*. The name is derived from a character of Lippi's, "Tartufo." It is the contraction of Tartufolo, a truffle —though what connection there is between truffles and hypocrisy it is hard to say. The word has passed in the French language into a synonym for a hypocrite, especially in matters of religion. There is another etymology suggested by M. P. Chasles—namely, from *truffer*, a word derived from low Latin, signifying to "deceive;" *tra-truffar*, to carry such deception to excess; then the transposition of the *r* and *a* would give *tartrufar*. The name Trufaldin in the 'Étourdi' may possibly have some connection with this.

not be difficult to find works that might have served as models to Molière if he had required them for the delineation of this celebrated character. A tragi-comedy of Scarron, entitled 'The Hypocrites,' has so many features of resemblance with the 'Tartuffe' that it may well have been consulted by our author. Molière is supposed, rightly or wrongly, to have had in his eye when drawing the principal character of the play, a certain Abbé de Roquette who became afterwards Bishop of Autun; and one famous scene is said to have been suggested by an incident that actually did take place at Court. Molière's first public assailant on this subject seems to have been the Curé of St Barthélemy, by name Pierre Roulès or Rouillé, who in a pamphlet entitled 'Le roi glorieux au monde,' after indulging in the most shamelessly fulsome laudation of his very Christian Majesty Louis XIV., proceeds to talk of Molière's work in the following terms: "A man, or rather a demon clad in human flesh, and dressed as a man, a more confirmedly impious libertine than ever existed in former ages, had been wicked and abominable enough to produce from out of his diabolical intelligence a play all ready to be made public, by being put upon the stage, to the derision of the whole Church, and in contempt of the most sacred character and most divine function, in contempt of all that is most holy in the Church."

The scene of 'Tartuffe' is laid in one of those households which, notwithstanding their wealth and the references made in their story to the Court and fashionable life, are essentially *bourgeois;* and in which a brisk and bustling *servante*—here called Dorine—acts invariably as factotum. Orgon, the master of the house,

husband of Elmire and father by a former marriage of Damis and Mariane, has been so duped by the sanctimonious behaviour of an unknown adventurer, Le Tartuffe, that he has admitted him into his intimacy, and made him, as it were, the moral and general controller of his whole household, much to the disgust of his wife, son, and daughter, and his sensible brother-in-law Cléante, though he is backed up by his old mother Madame Pernelle. He even wishes to marry his daughter Mariane (though her affections are already engaged to Valère) to Tartuffe, who, however, has other ideas in his head, and has conceived no less a villany than the seduction of Elmire, the wife of his friend and benefactor.

We are first introduced to the family in the absence of the father, and are left in no doubt as to their sentiments in respect to the hypocrite. But the first remarkable, and perhaps the only purely comic, scene in the play, occurs at Orgon's return. "Has all gone well during my two days' absence?" he asks. "My mistress," answers Dorine, "had a great deal of fever and a bad headache the first evening, and could eat nothing:"—

"*Org.* And Tartuffe?

Dor. He supped alone in her presence, and very devoutly devoured two partridges with half a hashed leg of mutton.

Org. Poor man!"

Dorine tells him that his wife had at last consented to listen to their suggestions, and be bled:

"*Org.* And Tartuffe?

Dor. He took courage like a man, and fortifying his soul

against all evils, to make up for the blood which my mistress had lost, he drank, for his breakfast, four good beakers of wine.

Org. Poor man!" [1]

In the next scene this foolish old dupe gives an account of his friend's excellences as follows: "He is a man—ah," he cries, language failing him—"a man, in short——"

> "*Orgon.* Ah! if you had but met him as I did,
> You would have felt the self-same friendship for him.
> Each day with gentlest looks he came to church,
> And near me placed himself upon his knees,
> Attracting wondering looks from all the crowd
> By the great fervour of his prayers to Heaven.
> Sometimes he sighed, sometimes threw up his eyes,
> Then, stooping humbly, kissed the sacred earth.
> When I went out, he went before me quick
> To offer holy water at the door;
> And when his servant (who in all things strove
> To be the lowly copy of his master)
> Informed me of his poverty and needs,
> I made him presents, but with modest zeal
> He pressed the half of all I gave him back.
> '*It is too much*,' he said; '*half is too much*;

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[1] Molière seems to have owed this expression, now so celebrated, of "Le pauvre homme," to the following incident: One evening during the campaign of 1662, Louis XIV., about to sit down to table, advised Péréfixe, Bishop of Rhodez, his former tutor, to do the same. It being a fast-day, the prelate withdrew, saying that he had but a light collation to make. As the answer raised a smile on the face of the bystanders, the king asked the reason, and was told by some one present that he might make himself quite easy on that score; and the same person then gave the king a detailed account of the prelate's dinner. As each dish, more *recherché* than its predecessor, was named, the king exclaimed, "Le pauvre homme!" with a varied intonation of voice.

I am not worthy of your charity.'
When I refused to take it back, the poor
He shared it with, before my very eyes.
At last, Heaven gave me grace to bring him here
Into my house, where all things since have prospered.
All he reproves, and even in my wife
Takes for my honour interest extreme,
Keeping me warned of each admiring look;
Six times more jealous than myself he proves;
Nor could you dream how high his ardour swells.
The smallest bagatelle he counts a crime,
And a mere nothing troubles his pure mind;
So that the other day he blamed himself
For catching of a flea in time of prayer,
And with unseemly anger slaying it."

It is not till the third act that Tartuffe himself appears. His first entrance is worthy of his character; he turns to his servant Laurent and bids him

"Put away my hair-shirt and scourge, and pray to Heaven to shed its light upon me. If any one asks for me, say that I am gone to share with poor prisoners the alms that have been bestowed upon me."

The scene which follows with Elmire reveals the hypocrite's abominable designs upon his benefactor's wife. He makes use of all his casuistry to prove to her that the love of heaven does not forbid the love of one in whom Heaven's beauties are reflected, and represents to her that to give herself to him would be less dangerous than to listen to a young gallant whose indiscretion might betray them. This is overheard by Damis, who bursts in, and immediately reports to Orgon—who follows him into the room—all that has passed. Orgon stands thunder-struck; but Tartuffe is equal to the occa-

sion. "Yes, my brother," he says, "I am a sinner, full of iniquity, and Heaven has chosen this way of punishing me. Drive me out of your house; I deserve no better. Yes, my dear son," he adds, turning to Damis, "speak! call me a traitor, a homicide, a thief. I will not contradict you. I will accept this shame on my knees, as due to the sins of my life." These tactics are successful. Orgon, completely duped, throws himself on his knees before Tartuffe to implore his pardon for having, even for one moment, doubted of his sanctity, and drives his son indignantly from his presence, cutting him off with his curse When Damis has gone, Tartuffe begs the incensed father to pardon him; and here occurs a line which was condemned by Molière's enemies as being a sacrilegious introduction of a scriptural phrase into a dramatic performance — "O Heaven, pardon him as I pardon him!"

This failure of justice leads to the climax of the play, a scene which it is difficult to describe, and still more to represent on the stage, and which the spectator can scarcely witness without a feeling of uneasiness. In order to prove the unworthiness of the favourite, Elmire resorts to the desperate expedient of seeking another interview with Tartuffe, of which her husband is the concealed witness, and which puts Tartuffe's intentions beyond doubt. The hypocrite takes everything upon himself. "It is true," he says, "Heaven forbids certain satisfactions, but arrangements can always be made; the evil of the action is rectified by the purity of the intention." Orgon, however, is man enough to vindicate his honour, and the play ends with the complete exposure and discomfiture of the impostor.

The 'Festin de Pierre' was, as has been said, the immediate successor of 'Tartuffe.' External circumstances had brought the legend upon which this play is founded under the consideration of the dramatist. The subject seems to have caught the fancy of the time, and was being produced in different versions in all the theatres of Paris; and we may easily suppose with what vivid satisfaction Molière took advantage of the possibility of thus striking a counter-blow to that by which he had already roused so much opposition. The picture of the hypocrite was scarcely complete without this audacious picture of the other extreme—the bold and ostentatious atheist and profligate, to whom nothing in heaven and earth was sacred, who scoffed at authority however constituted, to whom all faith was ridiculous superstition, and honour and truth mere figments of the fancy. What more subtle lesson could there be than that which shows the final arrival of both these criminals at the same wretched end, the gratification of their own selfish passions, in defiance of every law of God and man? The moral likeness in them is intensified by the enormous difference in all their professions and surroundings; and Tartuffe gains an additional blackness through every daring line by which Don Juan is put upon the canvas by his side. The sanctimonious hypocrite indeed becomes more odious to us when compared with the hardened and irreclaimable libertine; yet if at times, as is the case in the many versions of the same well-known story written in almost all languages, our sympathies are claimed by the undoubted bravery that tempers the utter want of morality of the hero—still his wickedness is shown in its worst light, and his well-merited punishment is so severe,

that this alone, if other proofs were wanting, would suffice to show that Molière had not intended to cast any slur upon religion in his 'Tartuffe,' but solely to scourge with his bitterest satire a false semblance of religion. The story had been dramatised already in Spanish, French, and Italian. The original legend would seem to have belonged to Spain, and its first appearance on any stage was in a play of Molina, a Spanish writer of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The story then passed into Italy, where it was dramatised by Onofreo Giliberti, and represented at Naples in 1652. Thence it passed on to the French stage in 1658 in the shape of a translation by Dorimond of Giliberti's play, and in 1665 assumed its place definitely among the finest productions of genius, when Molière took the legend in hand. The story of Don Juan's infidelities, and of the punishment which they at last meet, is so well known in all languages as to have become hackneyed; but in no other version have we the same deep philosophy, and thorough and accurate knowledge of the world and society as then existing. The play opens with an interview between Sganarelle[1] the valet of Don Juan, and Gusman, the serving-man of Elvira, the Don's latest victim, from whom, after jilting her as he had done so many others, he is now flying. Gusman expresses his astonishment at such conduct, and his inability to comprehend it, to which Sganarelle replies as follows:—

"If you knew the gentleman as well as I do, you would not find it so difficult. I do not say, mind you, that he has

[1] Molière always played this part himself.

changed his feelings with regard to Donna Elvira; but let me tell you, between you and me, that you have in Don Juan, my master, the most wicked man that ever trod this earth—a madman, a dog, a devil, a Turk—a heretic fearing neither heaven, nor saint, nor God, nor hobgoblin, spending his life like a mere brute-beast, a hog of Epicurus, a regular Sardanapalus. . . . You say he has contracted a marriage with your mistress. A marriage with him is nothing to contract; that's his regular trick for catching the fair sex. He is a wholesale marrier. Wife, maiden, city lady, peasant girl, all is grist that comes to his mill; and if I were to tell you the names of all the ladies he has married in different quarters, the chapter would last till nightfall. Heaven's vengeance must surely overtake him sooner or later, and I had sooner serve the devil himself than my master."

Don Juan interrupts the dialogue, and Gusman slips off. Sganarelle, encouraged by his master to speak openly to him, freely expresses his disapproval of his manner of living, whereupon the libertine expresses himself as follows:—

"A pretty thing indeed to be tied down to one love, and in the heyday of youth to be insensible to the charms of all other beauties. Beauty charms me wherever I meet with it. It is in vain that I have plighted my troth; my love for one charmer does not allow of my doing others injustice. There is an indescribable pleasure to me in conquering by a hundred acts of devotion the heart of a young beauty—in watching one's progress towards victory day by day—in overcoming with sighs, tears, and transports the resistance of a young heart, which succumbs with difficulty. But when one has once obtained one's object, one has nothing more to say, or to desire,—all the charm of passion has departed, and the easy tranquillity of such a love lulls to sleep, unless some new object comes to kindle our desires afresh, and to present to our heart the seductive attraction of a new conquest to be made. I feel within me a heart large enough to love the

whole world; and, like Alexander, I could wish there were other worlds, in order to extend the area of my conquests."

Sganarelle continues to use the privilege accorded to him by his master, and remonstrates with him for daring to despise the warnings of Heaven; and under cover of reprehending the scandalous conduct of some supposed sinner, administers to him the following lecture, which we particularly recommend to our readers:—

"I am not speaking to *you*, God forbid! You know what you are doing, and if you have no faith, at all events you have your own reasons for what you do. But there are certain ne'er-do-wells in the world who are libertines without knowing why they are so; who set up for being strong-minded because they think it becomes them to be so. Now, if I had a master like one of these fellows, I would look him straight in the face and ask him plainly, How dare you trifle thus with Heaven, and are you not afraid of laughing as you do at all that is holy? Nicely it becomes you, little earth-worm, little myrmidon that you are (mind I am speaking to the supposed master I told you of)—nicely it becomes you to dare to turn into ridicule that which all men revere! Do you think that because you are a man of quality, with a curled wig, feather in your hat, gold lace on your coat, cherry-coloured ribbons (I'm not talking to you, mind, but to that other)—do you think, I say, that you are any the better man for all that, that you may do what you like, and that no one shall dare to tell you the truth? Let me, who am only your valet, tell you that Heaven punishes the impious sooner or later; that a wretched life brings on a wretched death; that——"

Don Juan, however, finding the lesson too personal, cuts it short, and the two worthies immediately begin to discuss a new intrigue. In the pursuit of this the

profligate is nearly drowned, but being saved by a peasant, Pierrot, requites the good service by supplanting him in the favours of his mistress, Charlotte; then, lest Charlotte should imagine that she has entirely monopolised his attention, he pays violent court to her friend Mathurine, and this gives rise to one of the most amusing scenes in this or any other play of Molière's, requiring, however, to be seen rather than read if it is to be thoroughly appreciated. Don Juan, with Charlotte and Mathurine hanging on either arm, gives each in turn to understand that she is the real mistress of his heart.

"*Don J.* What shall I say to you? You each affirm that I have promised to marry you. Surely each of you knows the real state of the case without it being necessary for me to give any further explanations. Why make me say the same thing over and over again? Cannot she whom I have really promised to marry find that within herself which will enable her to make light of what the other says? Is there any necessity for her to trouble herself, provided I keep my promise? All the speeches in the world will not mend matters. We must act, not speak; facts are better than words, and it is by facts that I will settle your dispute; and when I marry one of you, then it will be seen which is the real possessor of my heart. (*Aside to M.*) Let her think what she likes; (*aside to C.*) Let her flatter her own imagination; (*to M.*) I adore you; (*to C.*) I am all yours; (*to M.*) All faces are ugly compared with yours; (*to C.*) One cannot bear to look on any girl when one has once seen you. (*Aloud.*) I have a few orders to give, and I will be back in a quarter of an hour."

Whereupon he leaves them to be consoled by Sganarelle, who tells them both that his master is "the husband of the whole human race."

Sganarelle, however, though a faithful servant, has many doubts on the subject of his master's religious scepticism, which is more appalling to his mind than profligacy. The examination to which he subjects him on this point is one of the most telling scenes in the play :—

"*Sgan.* Can it be possible that you do not believe in heaven?

Don J. Enough of that!

Sgan. That means that you do not. Nor in hell? . . . No more in the one than in the other. Nor in an after life? [*Don Juan laughs.*] What on earth do you believe in, then?

Don J. I believe that two and two are four, Sganarelle, and that twice four are eight.

Sgan. A pretty belief and pretty articles of faith indeed! Your religion, from what I see, is one of arithmetic. I must confess that strange follies creep into men's heads; and that however much one may have studied, one is often not much the wiser. For my part, sir, I have not studied as much as you, and, thank God, no one can boast of ever having taught me anything; but with my small amount of common-sense and judgment, I can see most things better than all the books in the world, and I can understand perfectly well that this world of ours is not a mushroom that has grown up in one night. I should like to ask you who made those trees there, those rocks, this earth, and that heaven up there, and if all that made itself? Look at yourself, for instance. There you are! Did you make yourself all alone? Can you contemplate all the inventions with which the machinery of a man's body is composed, without admiring the manner in which every part fits into one another. Those nerves, bones, veins, arteries, those — those — lungs, that heart, this liver, and all the other ingredients which are there, and which—— Oh, I say, do please interrupt me. I cannot argue without some contradiction. You are silent on purpose, and you let me go on speaking out of pure malevolence.

Don J. I am waiting for your reasoning to come to an end.

Sgan. My reasoning is that, whatever you may say to the contrary, there is something admirable in man which all the wise men in the world fail to explain. Is it not marvellous to see me here, and that I should have something in my head which conceives a hundred different thoughts in one moment, and makes my body do whatever it pleases? I want to clap my hands, raise my arm, look upwards, stoop my head, move my feet, go to the right, to the left, forwards, backwards, turn round— [*He falls on the ground.*

Don J. There, now, your fine reasoning has broken its nose!"

We need not dwell upon the story of the statue, the stony image of the Commander whom Don Juan had lately killed, which he bids his servant invite to supper. The fable is so familiar in many languages that it is hardly necessary to say more than that the statue nods its acceptance, and subsequently keeps its appointment by appearing at supper; that the Commander in return bids Don Juan sup with him on the morrow; and that, when the Don, who fears neither ghost nor devil, appears at the rendezvous, the statue seizes him by the hand, and amidst thunderings and flashes of lightning, the earth opens and swallows him up, much to the dismay of poor Sganarelle, who exclaims—

"My wages, my wages! There now, every one is satisfied by his death. Offended Heaven, broken laws, dishonoured families, outraged relations, women led astray, husbands driven to distraction, all the world is now satisfied. I alone am to be pitied! My wages, my wages, my wages!"

After those two profound and brilliant studies of the false believer and the unbeliever, the hypocrite and

sceptic, the two impersonations of evil most dangerous to humanity, we come to the climax of Molière's poetical philosophy, the revelation of his own grieved heart and prophetic soul. 'The Misanthrope'! Language has no better word to express the anguish of disappointed and angry love than that which represents the most dismal of sentiments, the hate of a human creature for humanity. This last and most terrible of passions, if it ever really exists in a human bosom, is beyond the reach of poetry; but nothing has afforded more powerful dramatic scenes, or called forth more touching and impressive revelations of human nature, than the sweetness turned into gall of a noble nature, wounded on every side by falsehood and betrayal, and seeing wherever it turns nothing that it can build its faith upon, no solid ground among the deceptions and desertions of life. In Molière's hero all the lesser reliances of ordinary good faith have followed the great loss of all confidence in the being most dear to him, and Alceste is presented to us at the moment when, discovering that he loves a heartless coquette, he has also discovered, with a vehemence due to his sick heart and embittered fancy, the thousand petty falsehoods of ordinary life.

The principal characters in the play are Alceste, the misanthropist; his friend Philinte, the representative of reason and common-sense; Éliante, the emblem of womanly truth and virtue; Célimène, a heartless coquette; Oronte, a poor rhymester; Acaste, a ridiculous "marquis" of the day; and Clitandre—the last three suitors also of Célimène. An additional interest is found in this greatest of all Molière's works in the fact already

referred to, that the parts of Alceste and Célimène were repeatedly played by Molière himself and his wife.

The play opens with an interview between the misanthrope and his friend, in which Alceste reproaches Philinte with the indiscriminate expressions of friendship which he bestows upon everybody. "I, your friend! Strike me off the list!" he cries;—

"I see you heap caresses on a man,
Loading with protestations, offers, oaths,
The passionate embrace with which you clasp him—
And when I afterwards ask who he is,
You hardly know his name! and when you part,
Your cooled affection also parts from him—
. . . . . .
In *my* friend's heart I claim the foremost place—
You are the friend of all the human race!"

Thus the key-note of the tragic comedy is struck at once; and when Philinte retorts by asking how it is that Alceste, with so high an ideal of truth, should prefer the arch-coquette Célimène to all other women, we are led to a deeper vein of sadness and bitter discontent. Alceste's tone at once changes, and the cause of his almost savage onslaught on polite insincerity becomes apparent. "Do not think I am blind to her faults," he says. "I own my weakness; I see them all; but she has made me love her in spite of them. It is not reason which rules love."

While he is making this confession Oronte comes in, with just such exaggerated expressions of affection as those which Alceste had upbraided his friend for making, and begs to be permitted to read them a sonnet. "I have the fault of being a little too sincere,"

says Alceste. "That is exactly what I want," cries the poet; but the result is, that he rushes out foaming with fury, and intent, instead of serving the misanthrope at Court, as he had offered, to do him all the harm possible.

In the second act, Alceste makes the same warm remonstrances to Célimène which he has done to Philinte —remonstrances still more sadly vehement as his feelings are more deeply engaged. "The first who comes has access to your heart," he says. "How is it that Clitandre has the happiness of pleasing you so much? Is it his long nail, or his mass of ribbons, or the width of his German breeches? You smile on all the world; and what have I more than every one else has?" While this scene goes on, the coquette's drawing-room gradually fills with a crowd of visitors, and a flutter of scandal arises. Célimène, encouraged by the applause of the others, demolishes the character of every one whose name is mentioned, till Alceste, who has been sitting by, bursts forth upon the company. The scene is brilliant, and full of bitter force. "Thrust home!" he cries; "spare no one! Yet if one of them were to appear, you would all rush to receive him with hands held out and flattering salutations." "Do not blame us —blame the lady," says, with the genuine instinct of a coward, one of the courtly lovers, discomfited by this assault.

But now Alceste's real troubles begin. He is sent for by the *Maréchaux*, who regulate all questions of honour —a mysterious call which has some connection with his insult to Oronte's verses. He then loses his lawsuit, which costs him twenty thousand francs; and, worst of all, finds out by a letter written by Célimène to Oronte,

that the coquette has deceived him, and loves him as little as she does his rivals. All these rivals, however, make the same discovery by the same means, Célimène having unwisely confided her opinion of each to the other; and the lady is thus caught in a trap, and exposed to the furious reproaches of one after another, all now as bitter as they were formerly flattering. At last the injured gallants withdraw, leaving her with Alceste, the most deeply injured of all. And now a fleeting impression is made upon the heart of Célimène herself. She bids her wounded lover

"Reproach me as you please: I have done wrong—
I do not hide it; and my heart confused
Offers to you no vain apology.
Of all the others I despise the rage,
But your resentment is too reasonable.
I know how guilty I must seem to you—
How all combines to prove I have betrayed
Your faith, and given you too just cause for hate,—
Hate me, then—I consent.

ALCESTE.

Ah, can I, traitress?—
Can I thus vanquish all past tenderness?
And howsoever ardently I long
To hate you, will my heart do't and obey me?

(*To* ELIANTE *and* PHILINTE.)

You see how far unworthy passion goes:
You are the witnesses, how weak I am;
But yet, to say the truth, you know not all,
For further depths remain, and you shall see
How vain it is to call us wise, and how
Each man at heart, being man, is always fool.

(*To* CÉLIMÈNE.)

Yes, false one, yes, I can forget your faults,
Excuse your errors in my inmost soul,
Cover them with the gentle names of weakness,
Vice of the age which has betrayed your youth;
If only with your heart you will consent
To flee the world with me, to follow now
Into the wilds where I have vowed to live;
Thus only can you, in the eyes of men,
Repair the evils you have done, and thus
After those scandals which great hearts abhor,
I yet may be allowed to love you still.

CÉLIMÈNE.

What, I! renounce the world ere I am old—
Go and be buried in your wilderness!

ALCESTE.

If your soul answer mine, what want we more?
Is not my love enough for your content?

CÉLIMÈNE.

At twenty solitude is terrible.
No; I have not a soul so great, so strong,
As to content myself with such a fate.
But if my hand would satisfy your wish,
And marriage——"

"No," cries Alceste, convinced at last of his folly. "This refusal has done more than all the rest. Since you are not able to find all in me as I to find all in you, I refuse, and free myself from your unworthy chains. May you be happy," he adds, turning to his sympathetic friends; "for me, betrayed on all sides, overwhelmed with injustice, I must escape from this gulf, and in some distant part of the earth find a shelter where a man of honour may be free to live."

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF HIS LIFE.

THE success of the 'Festin de Pierre' and the 'Misanthrope,' though these plays are now universally considered as Molière's highest works, was not so considerable as to encourage him in this loftier vein. 'Tartuffe,' indeed, which is usually conjoined with them, had a brilliant and triumphant success; but it is very probable that, as was said by his enemies at the time, something of this was due to the fact that it had been so long forbidden, and had been the occasion of so severe and sustained a combat between the author and the authorities. A play which the king himself had forbidden in public, but enjoyed in private, which Bourdaloue and Bossuet had both attacked from the pulpit, and which now, at last, after innumerable struggles, had reached the ear of the public, naturally attracted interest everywhere. The crowd thronged about the doors of the theatre. "Cloaks and sides were both torn," says the annalist of the time. On the other hand, that same crowd had shown no desire to hear the 'Misanthrope.' "One would think one was listening to a preacher," they said,

with undisguised yawns. And though many of Molière's literary opponents are said to have done justice to this great work, the very apologetic character of their praises shows against what kind of popular indifference they had to contend. "Molière could not have written a bad piece," Racine said, though he had but lately quarrelled with and separated himself from the comedian; and this opinion could only have been expressed in reply to uncompromising censure. We cannot but acknowledge, high as is our estimate of this work, that the 'Misanthrope' reads better than it acts; and it is evident that those dramas in which philosophy, reason, or passion came in, taking the place of laughter, fell somewhat flat upon Paris. It does not seem apparent that either this or the 'Festin de Pierre' was ever represented at Court; and if so, it is a curious omission. Thus it would appear that the dramatist had little encouragement to rise into the higher elevations of his art. His king and his countrymen liked him better when he made them laugh, and all the better if some one was galled by the laughter and made to wince. Accordingly, Molière plunged into full swing of brilliant malice and merry-making, after this wonderful serious chapter in his life. The melancholy countenance of Alceste disappears, and all the anxious compunctions of that Sganarelle who had been the voice of homely wisdom, reason, and thought to his brilliant master, Don Juan; a Sganarelle turned rustic, and in consequence a little broader, more primitive, in his shrewd folly and burly wit, steps upon the stage with his bundle of fagots and the twinkle in his eyes, and lo! all graver ideas dispersing like the mists, it is the genial uproar and fun of the

'Médecin malgré lui,' strangest contrast to the 'Misanthrope'—or the audacious malice of the 'Amour Médecin,' which flash back again upon the familiar stage, evidently to the heartfelt relief of both players and audience. To make themselves up into an impudent but amusing caricature of the Court doctors, and to wag their heads together in absurd consultation, must have been more congenial to the troupe than to declaim the fine speeches of Philinte and Alceste; and Molière, too, seems to have thrown himself with renewed spirit into this crusade against the physicians of the time. Whether it was simply the ridiculous aspect of their semi-science that struck him—or whether his contempt was heightened by the painful sense that, while his own health was failing daily, these solemn quacks had no real help to give—it would be difficult to say; but the attack upon them has in it all the gaiety and vigour of a fresh start. He launches his arrows at them with positive pleasure in the effect produced, yet with a persistent enmity which seems to imply some real root of grievance. Why was the world to reverence these deadly craftsmen who could do nothing for a man except torture and kill him? Any disguised lover—nay, any disguised clown—could play the part and defy detection. Their solemn gestures, their assumption of infallibility, their utter callousness and ignorance, inspired him with laughter, scornful, extravagant, now and then sharp with a touch of passion, but in every case genuine, and full of the large spontaneousness of true mirth. After all, the malice of the picture is rather in the French than the English sense of the word—laughing spite and amusement, rather than calculating ill-will. The 'Amour Médecin,' which was the opening of the

attack, is an audacious caricature, which for us has, of course, lost all its personality, but which at the time of its production was as recognisable as a cartoon in 'Punch,' and much more offensive. Then came the 'Médecin malgré lui,' which is less satire than broad fun and frolic; and then the pitiful case of 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac,' in which a poor gentleman from the country—an honest, perplexed provincial—is driven half mad by a wicked conspiracy, of which a crowd of doctors are the tools. The 'Malade Imaginaire,' which was the last of Molière's productions, takes up again the favourite subject. No doubt the doctors afforded a more than usually evident opening for satire, and that they had specially exposed themselves to it in Molière's time seems apparent from graver records. The four individuals whom he specially caricatures in the 'Amour Médecin' had been the means, according to the opinion of the populace, expressed with as much wit and still more frankness than that of Molière, of "delivering France from the Cardinal." They had met in consultation around the deathbed of Mazarin, whom one declared to be dying of disease of the liver, another of the lungs, a third of the kidneys, and a fourth of mesenteric abscess. So universal was the feeling against them, that at the other extremity of the social scale Louis XIV. himself, on being appealed to against the assailant of the physicians, far from receiving the complaint as he had done the former remonstrances on the subject of the hypocrite, answered with some wit, "The doctors make us weep so often, that they may well now and then give us occasion for a laugh."

After this amusing onslaught, another great comedy—

one of Molière's greatest indeed, but in a different kind from the serious works already discussed—was placed upon the stage. This was in 1668, two years after the 'Misanthrope.' The 'Avare' might almost be taken as a pendant to 'Tartuffe,' so thoroughly does the satire penetrate the vice it assails; but it is as brilliantly comic as the other is gloomy. The miser, though not a feature is spared—though he is set before us in full relief, pitiless, heartless, the impersonation of grasping and cruel parsimony, as the hypocrite was the impersonation of false religion and secret vice—has nothing gloomy about him, but in his worst moments amuses rather than disgusts the reader. His sayings have become proverbial. The cunning folly of his economies, the bewildered stupidity which is caused by the absorption of his mind in one idea, and the violent despair into which the supposed loss of his treasure throws him, are all as distinctly painted as if the picture had been of the most serious and tragic kind; but, on the contrary, it is suffused with so broad a light of humour, the laughter in it is so honest and full, that no pain can ever come from it,—nothing like the sting of suffering and deception which runs through and through the other. From whatsoever reason, the genius of Molière had recovered its elasticity, and even a subject containing so many tragic elements cannot beguile it longer from the natural mirth and delightful humour which are its life and breath. Thus, while we cannot take advantage even of the pretty young people who move about in the background of the piece which 'Tartuffe' overshadows with his sombre presence, the corresponding groups in the 'Avare' are thrown up and made more charming in all their grace of costume,

their pretty sentiment and still prettier quarrels, by the ludicrous form of the principal figure, so mean, so impassioned, so shrewd, cunning, absurd, and laughable. There are none of Molière's plays which may be taken more completely as typical of his genius; for no one can doubt its power, while its mirth is delightful, the satire scathing, yet entirely free of bitterness, and the very passion of the vice so genuine yet so ludicrous, that the thrill of wholesome terror with which we perceive to what length of sordid misery this evil may go, is softened by the inextinguishable laughter with which we contemplate the miser, arresting himself and everybody round him, weeping, blaspheming, appealing to heaven and earth, inconsolable for the loss of his dear money-box, for the theft of which he would fain hang the whole human race. When, with his whole soul absorbed in this bereavement, he is told that it is the beautiful eyes of the daughter for whom he cares nothing which have inflamed the lover who has stolen *her*, and not the gold, his bewildered exclamation, "The beautiful eyes of my money-box!" "Les beaux yeux de ma cassette!" has furnished the world with one of its most universally understood proverbs; and many have heard of the miser who stole the oats from his own horses, who have little acquaintance enough either with Harpagon or with Molière.

In this, as in 'Tartuffe,' though there are indications of an intention to identify Harpagon with one of the country nobility, it is still something much more like the life of the rich *bourgeois*, the life with which he was himself most conversant, that Molière assails—a life of wealth without splendour, without dignity, or any of the charms of rank: though it is difficult to

understand what Harpagon could want with an *intendant* in such a position. The "servante" who figures so largely in the somewhat grim domestic interior is, however, here made into something like a housekeeper, and takes part less familiarly in all the discussions of the family. We may conjecture that the miser was a rich *fermier-général*, who had extracted his money out of the sweat of the poor, or a retired lawyer grown wealthy by means of bribes and patronage. Curiously enough, the 'Avare' also failed to please the Parisian public. It was received even more coldly than either the 'Festin de Pierre' or the 'Misanthrope,' having been played only nine times at its first beginning. A second attempt was made after an interval with no better success. What encouragement for the unsuccessful author, what curious doubt of the wisdom of the public, lies in such a fact! There were other motives which might have swayed the audience in respect to the two plays above named. The first gave the chief place to a profligate and atheist; the second might be too solemn, too serious for the stage; but the 'Avare' is witty throughout, brilliant in humour and fun, and all the amusing qualities. Was it nothing but its higher excellence as art which discouraged the witty Parisians, the brilliant group of Molière's contemporaries? Voltaire gives an even less comprehensible reason. "The same prejudice," he says, "which proved the failure of the 'Festin de Pierre,' *because it was written in prose*, injured 'L'Avare' also." Perhaps, however, it is only a Frenchman who can fully understand the weight of this prejudice.

The next victim of Molière's laughing humour, still warm and genial and without bitterness, belongs to a

class of citizens lower in importance than that of Orgon and Harpagon. The 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' was produced in 1670. His time was drawing short, and the clouds of sickness and weariness which so often obscure an ending life were gathering round him, but never was his humour more gay or his style more easy and light. In the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' it is the vanity of the *parvenu*, the self-made rich man, recently delivered from the cares of daily work, and fully disposed if possible to turn himself into a butterfly and copy all the follies and splendours of the Court, which the dramatist takes in hand. M. Jourdain is the most delightful of dupes; his overflowing good-humour and complacency are irresistible. His wife who scolds and his maid who laughs at him are entirely unable to restrain his delightful self-satisfaction. From his tailor, who makes him as gay as a peacock, to his masters, who teach him all manner of accomplishments, culminating in the professor of philosophy who informs him, to his intense delight, that he has been talking prose all his life without knowing it, he is credulous of all, and open as the day to every imposition that can be put upon him. A more delightful simple figure could not be; his enthusiasm for good manners and good training is so genuine, his faith so unbounded in all that is said to him, his efforts to attain excellence so conscientious, that the reader will find his heart entirely taken captive by M. Jourdain. The piece is no more than a farce, yet it is the most charming of comedies. It is vulgarity in its most genial guise. The pendant to this picture is a somewhat similar yet very different figure, drawn from the depths of provincial gentility, the 'Comtesse d'Escarbagnas,' a country lady who has been

in Paris, and who has brought from the metropolis something of the usages of the Parisienne. Her elaborate civilities and fine language, however, though sufficiently amusing, do not come within a hundred miles of M. Jourdain's delightful desire for self-improvement, which is by no means confined to the outside. The 'Comtesse d'Escarbagnas' was produced in 1671, in which year also appeared the lively and amusing play, more like the productions of Molière's youth than those of recent years, called the 'Fourberies de Scapin,' in which, after all this long interval of time, and after so much growth and development of genius, we find ourselves wafted back, as it were, into the region of the 'Étourdi.' Perhaps this return upon the long-relinquished work of youth is a sign of some weariness, and desire to save himself the labour of composition, on Molière's part; and probably the play was but the working out of the early *canevas* or framework for a play, entitled 'Gorgibus dans le Sac,' to which reference was made in our first chapter—as 'Georges Dandin,' produced some time before, in the year of the 'Avare,' was a working out of the 'Jalousie du Barbouillé.' Nothing can be more probable than that, looking over the stores of the past, the dramatist, sick and worn as he was with constant labour, should have been glad of these skeletons, upon which he could still breathe and make them live.

And while Molière thus flung out of the profusion of his genius sketch after sketch of living fun and humour, the most vigorous, easy, and genial works of his life, he was also kept in occupation by the perpetual diversions of the Court, which, after every little interval of war or of mourning, turned back to the splendid slave who was

bound to its service, and could beautify its masques, and *fêtes*, and ballets with melodious verse and graceful story. The play of 'Amphitryon' seems to hold a place midway between the comedies intended for the public and those which were specially for the Court. 'Mélicerte,' 'Les Amants Magnifiques,' and 'Psyché' were all of this latter class. Some of them were never introduced to the actual stage at all. They were given at Versailles where still the king himself danced in the *entrées*, the courtiers grouped themselves around in exaggerated admiration, and there was but little thought of Molière. He was not thought any more of indeed, it would appear, than many another player. His best plays sometimes fell flat, and even the public of Paris was not aware how great a gulf lay between all its other playwrights and this man of the Palais Royal whom it applauded or neglected as its humour might dictate. "Who is the man of greatest genius in France?" asked the king of the great critic Boileau. "Molière, sire." Louis XIV. was surprised, though it was his favourite actor, the comedian to whom he was so indulgent and patronisingly kind, who was in question. "I don't think so," said the king; "but you know that kind of thing better than I do." So good-humouredly indifferent, so unconscious of anything beyond the common, were Molière's masters, the people and the king.

Two more efforts only remained for the dramatist, now fast hastening to his end. One of them, the 'Femmes Savantes,' was an amplification of the theme with which he began his individual career as a public satirist and critic of the manners of his time. The 'Précieuses' was made to bear a semblance of less severity by the fact

that the blue-stockings whom he selected as its heroines were clumsy imitators of the tendencies of the age,—young and foolish aspirants to fashion, imitators of the real *précieuses*. The 'Femmes Savantes' had no such softening atmosphere of youthfulness and masquerading to mitigate the blow; though still as ever its scenes are laid in the circle of the *bourgeoisie*, rather than in the loftier world where real great ladies posed around their society-poet. All the extravagances are there, but not that fantastic and indescribable inspiration of fashion and high life, which permits extravagance. The glamour of the Court which we see in the light and airy sketches of the 'Fâcheux' and in the bitter sadness of the 'Misanthrope' is not in the Parisian house where the good commonplace husband vainly struggles against his feminine rulers, and mother, daughter, and aunt vie with each other in enthusiasm over the Abbé Cotin's verses. Unhappy Abbé Cotin! he had ventured, when launching his feeble shaft at Boileau, to touch also, in foolish temerity, the shield of the great dramatist. Tremendous was the revenge taken upon him. Molière, indeed, was never above taking revenge upon his enemies; and the somewhat cruel expedient of using the actual verses of the poetaster as emblematic of the nonsense applauded in these superfine circles of critics, though a savage mode of vengeance, has perhaps sufficed to keep alive a name which before now must otherwise long have been forgotten.

Last of all Molière's works comes the 'Malade Imaginaire.' We may be permitted to suppose that in this too there was some using up of old materials, prompted, perhaps, by that desire to spare a little trouble which is

one of the symptoms of failing strength. In the list of the first pieces which Molière's inexperienced hand strung together for his troupe of strollers, there is one which is called 'Le Grand Benêt de Fils aussi sot que son Père.' This could scarcely be other than the original of Thomas Diafoirus, the son of one of the doctors who takes advantage of the fancied sufferings of the *Malade Imaginaire*. Along with this germ of story was there, perhaps, a forlorn fancy of cheating sickness out of its depression by laughing at that, as he had laughed at everything else — and a sick and melancholy desire to be thought less really than fancifully ill by those about him, by the friends who would fain have persuaded him to give up the theatre, and by the young wife, who perhaps would be less indisposed towards her husband were he less suffering? It is but a conjecture, but it is not an unpermissible one, we think. A reconciliation had been patched up between the aggrieved husband and foolish wife in the end of 1671, and such gleams of content as were possible had been in his waning life. Not long before, too, he had been publicly satirised as a hypochondriac. It might well be that Molière, fading daily towards the grave, yet clinging to his work, his theatre, the tumult of applause, publicity, and excitement, which are of the very essence of an actor's life, would very fain, even to himself, have been proved a fanciful invalid—a *malade imaginaire*.

The 'Femmes Savantes' was performed in March 1672, and proved a failure,—not, it would appear now, from any resistance of the affronted blue-stockings whom his previous assault had reduced to silence, and, indeed, had done much to extinguish altogether—but out of

public indifference to the reproduction of a theme which had already been treated with such brilliant wit and spirit. About the same time, Molière's old and faithful associate, Madeleine Béjart, the friend if not the love of his youth, the sister of his wife, died, and it began to be evident that his own days were numbered.

"Two months before his death, M. Despréaux (Boileau) went to see him, and found him much troubled by his cough, and so exhausted by it that his end seemed approaching. Molière, though naturally of cold and reserved manners, received him with great friendliness, which encouraged M. Despréaux to say to him, 'My poor M. Molière, you seem to be in a very sad condition. The continual efforts of your mind, and exertion of your lungs on the stage, ought to induce you at least to consent to give up acting. Is there no one in your company except yourself who can play the first parts? Content yourself with writing, and leave acting to one of your comrades: this will make you more respected by the public, who will then consider your actors as your hired[1] servants. And thus the actors themselves, at present not too submissive to you, will better feel your superiority.' 'Ah, Monsieur!' cried Molière, 'how can you speak so? It is a point of honour with me not to give up.' 'A pleasant point of honour,' (the satirist continues to himself), 'which consists in blackening his face daily to produce the moustache of Sganarelle, and in giving his back to all the beatings of Comedy. What! this man, the first man of our time, both for talent and truly philosophical sentiments —this ingenious censor of all human follies—cherishes a greater folly than that which he ridicules daily! This shows what men are.'"

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[1] They were in fact *sociétaires*, members of a co-operative body (as are still the more important actors of the *Théâtre Français*), each one receiving his share of the profits. Molière is described as having three shares in the profits of his own plays, two as author.

On a former occasion Molière had refused to postpone an evening's representation, notwithstanding his own illness, on account of the "twenty poor workmen" whose comfort depended upon his appearance. The whole theatre hung upon him as upon its centre: but at the same time who can doubt that the charm of that profession which had tempted him from all better prospects at twenty-one, held by him now, making him cling to the last to those boards which had witnessed so many triumphs? He could not bear to give it up—to acknowledge himself beyond its active work. It was "a point of honour." How many a man growing old, growing feeble, yet incapable of giving in, or acknowledging failure, will understand with painful sympathy, what Molière meant! Why should the great dramatist of France take pride in wearing the livery of Sganarelle or Scapin, and submit to the stick brandished by Du Croisy or La Grange? Who can say? It was his trade, which he had chosen when he was young, which he had clung to all his life, which he could not bow his head and acknowledge himself to be no longer capable of now.

After this the last sad conclusion came very rapidly. The 'Malade Imaginaire' was performed for the first time on the 10th of February 1673. The end of the story we take as it stands in the narrative of Grimarest, which Moland sanctions by quoting it, as bearing "a striking character of truth," notwithstanding all the doubt that has been thrown upon that biographer. Feeling worse than usual, Molière had sent, according to this narrative, for his wife, and had announced to her, in the presence of his young friend and disciple Baron, the

suffering state in which he was; but refusing again to postpone the representation on account of the many poor people whose bread depended upon it, he had the company called together and urged punctuality upon them, declaring that he would not play if the curtain was drawn up later than four o'clock. All was ready to the moment, and the performance began. The action of the play turns upon the pretended death of Argan, the hypochondriac, who takes this means of proving the affection of his wife; and again we find a painful reflection of the real circumstances in the strange scene, where laid out on the pretended bed of death which was so soon to be a real one, Molière heard from the lips of his faithless wife the heartless words which he had put into the mouth of the deceitful Béline. The scene will be found in the next chapter, in the description of this play. "From what a burden am I delivered!" says the wife; "what was the use of him? a man of whom everybody was tired, coughing, spitting, troublesome, always ill-tempered, wearing us all out, and scolding night and day." With what heart must Armande Molière have pronounced these words, or he, with death already in his veins, have listened to them? But the play was played out to the end; and the *intermède* with which it concludes—the "burlesque, in recitation, song, and dance, of the ceremony of making a doctor"—began. The mock physicians assembled, apothecaries and surgeons dancing in to their appointed places; and the ludicrous examination began in the mock-Latin which Molière was fond of using. But when the moment came at which the pretended neophyte had to reply, something occurred which was not in the *rôle*. "Most of the spectators perceived

that in pronouncing the word *juro* a convulsion seized him." But he made an effort to conceal this by a grimace, and the terrible piece of folly came to an end.

"When the piece was finished he put on his dressing-gown, and going to the box in which Baron was, asked him what was said of the piece. M. Baron answered, that his works were always successful when known, and that the more they were heard the more they were liked. 'But,' he added, 'you seem worse than you were a little while ago.' 'That is true,' said Molière; 'I am dying of cold.' Baron, having touched his hands, found them frozen, and putting them into his muff[1] to warm them, sent for his chair that Molière might be carried home at once—he himself accompanying the chair, in terror lest something might happen to him between the Palais Royal and the Rue de Richelieu, where he lived.

"When he was in his room, Baron wished him to take some soup which his wife had always ready for her own use; for no one could take more care of personal comfort than she did. 'Oh no,' said Molière, 'my wife's soups are like brandy, too strong for me. Give me rather a bit of bread and a morsel of Parmesan.' Laforest brought him what he asked for: he ate it with some difficulty, and was put to bed. He had only been there for a moment when he sent to his wife for a pillow filled with some soporific drug which she had promised him to make him sleep. 'Anything that does not enter into the body I take willingly,' he said; 'but the remedies that must be swallowed alarm me. They are enough to take from me the little life I have left.' A moment after he was seized by a fit of coughing, and asked for light. 'There is a change,' he said. Baron, seeing the blood that had come, was alarmed, and cried out. 'Do not be frightened,' said Molière, 'you have already seen more than

[1] At that time, as later in England, part of the dress of an exquisite.

that. Nevertheless, go and call my wife.' Two nuns were with him, who were in the habit of coming to Paris during Lent to ask for charity, and to whom he gave a lodging in his house. It was they who gave him, at this last moment, the pious aid which might have been expected from their charity; and he manifested to them all the sentiments of a good Christian, and the resignation he owed to the will of the Lord. He drew his last breath in the arms of these two good women, suffocated by the blood which poured from his mouth. When his wife and Baron reached the room he was dead."

All the religious consolation or care which the great comedian received was from these poor women. In the meantime, in the excitement of the sudden catastrophe, Molière's brother-in-law, and other friends, were running here and there in search of a priest. Two refused to come to the bedside of the player, the author of 'Tartuffe;' and when at last a third was found who consented, he came too late. The two poor nuns alone could testify to the pious end Molière made at last. M. Bazin thinks, or hopes, that one of these nuns might be his own sister, who had taken the veil; but this seems little more than conjecture. At all events they were friends and guests of years, who were in the habit of finding shelter in his house during their Lenten pilgrimages of charity. On their certificate the unshriven penitent was grudgingly allowed the Christian burial which his wife—who can doubt, with many a sore compunction, heartless as she was—demanded with a perseverance which would not be denied. Poorly, with a single reluctant priest in attendance, he was carried through the streets by night, with gloomy glimmer of

torches and the poorest broken chant, not much more than might have been granted to a malefactor, to his grave; but yet had at least the privilege of a grave like other men, not cursed by the Church, although but faintly blessed. The poor player had scarcely more to hope for from Rome at his best.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS LATEST WORKS.

THE works of Molière's later period, after the great climax of his three most serious plays, must now be treated without strict regard to chronological order. Their exact succession has been already indicated. In this more detailed account we may facilitate our task by classifying the different dramas, and arranging them rather by their importance than by actual date. He had but six years to live after the period of the 'Misanthrope,' and during that brief time one play followed another as quickly as they could be put upon the stage. Of these the first and most important was the 'Avare,' of which something has already been said. Though not, it seems, popular at its first appearance, it has always kept a place on the stage, and is now, perhaps, the most generally favoured of all Molière's graver dramas. It is, however, a kind of contradiction in terms to describe as grave, a play so full of humorous situations and pure comedy. It is so complete, while so amusing a study of the passion of avarice, that it naturally takes an intermediate place between the almost tragic fervour of the

three greatest comedies of Molière, and the delightful fun, bordering upon farce, of his after works. In right of this we place it at the head of the productions of his later life.

The principal characters in the 'Avare' are Harpagon the miser, his prodigal son Cléante and daughter Élise, and a certain Valère, in love with Élise, who introduces himself into Harpagon's house under the disguise and quality of house-steward, in order to have access to the object of his affections. Cléante has fallen a victim to the charms of a young lady, by name Mariane, who lives in close retirement, upon very slender means, with her invalid mother; but matters are complicated by the fact that Harpagon has determined to marry this very Mariane himself, and to bestow his daughter's hand upon Anselme, a gentleman of his own mature age: and the two pair of lovers are driven to despair until the moment when Anselme discovers himself to be the long-lost father of both Valère and Mariane, and matters are brought to a happy conclusion by the union of Cléante with Mariane, and of Valère with Élise. The comic element is represented by La Flèche, Cléante's valet, Maître Jacques, who combines the offices of cook and coachman to Harpagon, and Frosine, described in the list of characters as a 'femme d'intrigue.'

The first of the many amusing scenes in which the miser shows his ruling passion is that in which he encounters his son's valet La Flèche, whom he looks upon with anxious suspicion, saying to himself that this is the very sort of fellow to say that there is a hidden treasure in the house. He orders the man to be off, and then calls him back. "Are you sure you

are not carrying anything away? Show me both your hands," he says:—

"*La F.* Here they are.
Harp. Now the other.
La F. The other?[1]
Harp. Yes.
La F. There they are.
Harp. (*pointing to his broad breeches pockets*). Have you got nothing in those?
La F. You had better look for yourself.
Harp. (*after feeling the bottom of his pockets*). Those wide breeches are just the thing to receive stolen goods."

"Here is another pocket," says the contemptuous lackey; upon which the miser coaxingly appeals to him. "Come, give it up without making me search you?"

The spectator soon discovers from Harpagon's self-communings that he has buried in his garden a box containing ten thousand francs, of which his thoughts are full, and which plays a very important part in the story. In the meantime he is occupied by his matrimonial intentions, in which Frosine is his agent, and by a supper which he is reluctantly compelled to give, in order to introduce Mariane to his family. The miser's instructions to his servants are highly characteristic. Having sent for them all, with Dame Claude, his housekeeper, at their head, he proceeds to harangue them as follows:—

"Come here, all of you, and let me give you your orders for this evening, and assign to each one his or her task.

[1] This scene is imitated from the 'Aulularia' of Plautus, where Euclio (the miser) tells the slave Strobilus, whom he suspects of having stolen his money, to show him his hands. Strobilus answers—
"Here they are!
Euclio. I see. Now show me your third hand."

Come forward, Dame Claude; let us begin with you. Good! I see you have your arms [her broom which she always carries] in your hand. It will be your duty to get everything clean and tidy, but especially take care not to rub the furniture too hard for fear of wearing it out. Moreover, I appoint you during the supper to the management of the bottles, and if one is lost, or anything broken, I shall look to you for it, and shall take it out of your wages. You, Brindavoine, and you, La Merluche, are to rinse the glasses and serve out the wine, but only when any of the company are thirsty, and not like those rascally lackeys, who go and press people, and put it into their heads to drink when they don't want it. Wait till you have been asked more than once — and always remember to serve plenty of water.

Maître Jacques (*aside*). Oh yes, wine without water is apt to get into people's heads.

La Merluche. Are we to take off our overcoats, sir?

Harpagon. Yes, when you see the company arriving; and take good care not to spoil your clothes.

Brindavoine. You know, sir, one of the lapels of my coat has got a great stain of lamp-oil on it.

La M. And my breeches have got a great hole in them, sir, behind; and with all due reverence to you, people can see——

Harp. (*to La M.*) That'll do. Always stand with your back to the wall, and present your front to the company. (*To B., showing him how to keep his hat in front of his coat to hide the oil-stain.*) And you, always keep your hat in this position when you're waiting."

He then turns to Maître Jacques, who combines the joint offices of cook and coachman, and who assures his master that he will do his best, provided he has plenty of money given him to do it with. This, of course, meets with opposition from the miser, backed up by the pretended steward Valère, who, by his exaggerated admoni-

tions to the cook not to be lavish, wins such favour with the master, that he actually embraces him, and declares his intention of having the famous old Latin axiom which Valère teaches him, "That one must eat to live, and not live to eat," engraved in letters of gold upon the mantelpiece of his dining-room. When, however, Harpagon, turning to Maître Jacques in his quality of coachman, bids him get the old carriage and horses ready to drive the company to the fair, the old servant tells him that the poor beasts have grown so thin owing to the rigid fasts imposed upon them by the penury of their master, that he cannot find it in his heart to harness them; and having received permission from Harpagon to tell him what people say of him, launches out as follows:—

"Sir, since you will have it so, I will tell you that you are the object of universal mockery, and people are never so pleased as when they tell tales of your stinginess. One neighbour says that you have private almanacks printed, in which you double the ember-days and vigils in order to oblige your household to observe more fasts than others; another, that you have always a quarrel ready to pick with your servants at "boxing" time, or when they are leaving you, so as to have a pretext for giving them nothing. Another says that you once had a warrant out against the cat of one of your neighbours for having eaten up the remains of a leg of mutton; another, that you were caught one night coming to steal your own horse's oats, and that your coachman—my predecessor—gave you, in the dark, I don't know how many blows with a stick, about which you never said anything. In a word, shall I tell you? we can go nowhere without hearing all sorts of stories about you. You are the laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood, and you are never spoken of except as a miser, a mean fellow, and rascally skinflint."

Maître Jacques's sincerity meets with the ordinary reward of such virtue—*i.e.*, a sound cudgelling from Harpagon first, and next from Valère.

After some pretty scenes with the young people—in one of which, when, introduced to Mariane as his future stepmother, Cléante takes a fine diamond from his father's finger and places it upon hers, notwithstanding the signs and nudges of the infuriated miser—we come to the grand incident of the *cassette*. La Flèche, whom Harpagon, with unconscious discrimination had declared exactly the sort of fellow to scent his treasure, rushes in with the casket, which he has found in the garden; and Cléante, seeing all the advantages to be gained from its possession, hurries away with him, leaving the stage for the miser, who, stumbling in, in impassioned despair delivers himself of the following well-known monologue, which, if partly imitated from Plautus, has yet acquired such originality in the words of the French dramatist as to be one of the best-known passages of French dramatic literature:—

"Thieves! thieves! murder! Justice, O heavens! I am undone, massacred! My throat is cut! My money is stolen! Who can have done it? What has become of him? Where is he?—where is he hiding? What can I do to find him? Where shall I run? where shall I not run? Is he there? Is he here? Who's that? Stop! (He clutches himself by the arm.) Give me back my money, you rascal!—Ah! it's myself! my mind's distraught—I know not where I am, who I am, or what I am doing. Alas! my poor money! my poor money! my dear friend! thou hast been taken from me; and since thou art gone, I have lost my sole support, my consolation, my joy; all is over for me, and I have nothing left to keep me in

this world. Without thee, it is impossible to live. It is all over; I have no strength left; I am dying; I'm dead; I'm buried. Will no one raise me from the dead by giving me back my beloved money, or by telling me who has taken it? Eh! what's that you say? Alas! nobody speaks. He who has robbed me must have carefully spied out the hour, and chosen the very time when I was talking to my rascally son. Let go—let's go to get justice. I'll have my whole house put to the torture—servant men and women, son, daughter—and myself too. How many people are collected here! and every one seems to me to be my thief. What are you talking about up there? about him who has robbed me? What noise is that I hear? Is it my thief? For heaven's sake, if you have any news of him, tell me! Is he hidden there amongst you? They all look at me and laugh. You will see that they have a share in the theft. Quick, magistrates, guards, constables, judges! racks, gallows, and executioners! I will have every one hung! and if I do not recover my money, I will hang myself afterwards."

The legal examination which follows is equally laughable. A magistrate is sent for to inquire into the circumstances of the theft. Maître Jacques, to be avenged on Valère for the cudgelling the latter had administered to him, and for the stinginess he had imposed on the whole household, tells his master that he has seen the new steward prowling about the garden, and upon his appearance Harpagon immediately accuses him of the crime. Valère, supposing the miser to allude to the fact that he has introduced himself under a feigned name and disguise in order to gain the affections of Élise, owns himself guilty. "Confess," cries Harpagon; "to what place have you carried it off?" The misunderstanding is more natural in the French, where both

daughter and casket are spoken of as *she*, than in English, where the neuter gender would have made all clear:—

"*Valère.* I have not carried her off: she is still in your house.

Harpagon (*aside*). O my dear money-box! It has not left my house?

Val. No, monsieur.

Harp. Tell me, now. You have not made free with it?

Val. I—made free! You do her wrong, and me also. It is the purest and most respectful love which I feel for her.

Harp. Feel for my money-box!

Val. I would rather die than think a thought that could offend her. She is too good and pure.

Harp. (*aside*). My money-box—pure!

Val. All my desire is to enjoy the sight of her; and there is nothing wrong in the passion with which her beautiful eyes have inspired me.

Harp. The beautiful eyes of my money-box!"

This amusing scene is copied, like a former one, from the 'Aulularia' of Plautus.

We have deviated from the chronological order in placing this great play first, before the gay and sparkling works which we shall now attempt to consider together as linked by a common subject. Two of them, however, appeared upon the stage at an earlier period than the 'Avare.' The reader will easily perceive that in so doing we follow a rule less arbitrary, but more important in literature, than that of chronology. The works that follow were much more popular than ever was the 'Avare,' which, as has been already said, shared the fate of all the finest productions of Molière's genius, and was regarded coldly by the public. This has never been the case in respect to the 'Médecin malgré lui,' which

became at once, as it has been ever since, one of the favourite comedies of the language, appreciated everywhere.

We will therefore now glance at the group of plays which form together one of the most persistent and trenchant attacks ever made by a satirist—those in which Molière assailed the medical profession. He had already aimed a preliminary arrow at the doctors in one scene of the 'Festin de Pierre.' He now opens all his artillery upon them. The 'Amour Médecin,' the 'Médecin malgré lui,' 'M. de Pourceaugnac,' and the last production of all, the 'Malade Imaginaire,' are all directed against the faculty. We begin with the 'Amour Médecin,' which is the first in chronological order following the 'Misanthrope.'

The plot is simple in the extreme. Sganarelle, left a widower with an only daughter Lucinde, is driven to despair by seeing her a prey to melancholy without any assignable cause, and sends for four doctors to cure her. These gentlemen hold a consultation, during which they discuss their own affairs, hardly troubling themselves about their patient at all. At last Clitandre, Lucinde's lover, introduces himself disguised as a doctor, and his mere presence has such a beneficial effect that he persuades the foolish father to sign a contract of marriage, merely for form's sake, between Lucinde and himself, as nothing less than this, he says, will cure her of a morbid and intense desire of marriage with which she is possessed. Sganarelle signs the contract in form—it is witnessed by a "notary" disguised as an apothecary—and the befooled father finds that he has himself married his daughter to the husband of her choice.

The first scene calls for notice as having given origin to an often-quoted saying. Sganarelle, after his wife's death, consults his friends M. Guillaume the upholsterer, M. Josse the goldsmith, Mdlle. Aminte his neighbour, and Mdlle. Lucrèce his niece, as to the best method of curing his daughter of the melancholy with which she is possessed; and they all severally give the advice best suited to further their own interests. M. Josse recommends a set of precious stones, M. Guillaume some beautiful furniture; upon which Sganarelle replies in the words which have became proverbial, "*You are a goldsmith*, M. Josse; *you are an upholsterer*, M. Guillaume.

The four doctors introduced into the second act represented the four most famous doctors of the Court of Louis XIV. — Desfougerais, Esprit, Guénaut, and Dacquin. Molière begged Boileau to invent Greek pseudonames for these, which should describe their peculiar styles of treatment. To the first, accordingly, he gave the name of Desfonandrès, "killer of men;" to the second (who stammered fearfully) that of Bahis, which means barking, snapping; the third, Guénaut, who was in the habit of delivering his opinions slowly and sententiously, received the name of Macroton, "slow speaker;" and the fourth, Dacquin, who was much addicted to bleeding, that of Tomès, "the carver."

The four learned gentlemen being left by Sganarelle to their consultation, and having been previously well paid by him for their pains, proceed to discuss their own private affairs and "cases," but the anxious father soon comes back and presses them for an "opinion." They begin by all speaking at once; but being urged to speak one at a time, M. Tomès recommends immediate and

copious bleeding, M. Desfonandrès an emetic; and when these two first have retired to quarrel about the different modes of treatment which they have severally prescribed, poor Sganarelle is left alone with the slow-speaking M. Macroton and the stammerer Bahis, of neither of whose opinions can he make head nor tail; and he decides upon having recourse to a vendor of Orviétan, who sings a song about the efficacies of his drug, and this serves as an introduction to a ballet, which closes the second act.

The scene of the quack-seller of Orviétan (Act ii. sc. 7) owes its origin to the fact that in 1647 a quack of Orvieto came to Paris and set up a stall at the Pont Neuf for the purpose of selling a drug which was to be a universal remedy for all diseases. The man first, and afterwards the drug, was called "Orviétan." It is mentioned by Sir Walter Scott in 'Kenilworth.'

The dispute of the two doctors Tomès and Desfonandrès, resumed at beginning of Act iii., is appeased by the entrance of M. Filerin, by whom some commentators have supposed Molière to have intended to personify "the Faculty itself," who represents to them the mischief which such sort of disputes must do them in the eyes of the world.

"We are not the only profession," says he, "which seeks to turn human weakness to its own advantage. Flatterers, alchemists, fortune-tellers, all take advantage of the vanity and ambition of credulous minds. But the greatest of all human weakness is the love men have of their own lives, and we doctors know how to turn it to our own profit by our pompous rubbish, and to make stock of the veneration for our trade with which the fear of death inspires all mankind. Let us not lose, then, the esteem which we owe to their weakness, and let us act in concert in treating our patients,

so as to get all the credit of any cures we may effect, and cast upon Nature's shoulders the mistakes which will sometimes occur."

Having thus brought in a solemn physician to pronounce judgment upon his brethren, Molière adds a bolt of lighter but not less telling sarcasm from the waiting-maid :—

"*Lisette.* Oh, gentlemen, are you still there? A wrong has been done to your profession. A wretched man has had the audacity to encroach upon your privileges, and, without waiting for a prescription from you, has killed a man by running him through the body."

Le Médecin malgré lui.

Here, too, we have a foolish old father, Géronte, driven to despair by the incurable malady of his daughter, who, like the young lady in the last-described play (named, too, like her, Lucinde), adopts the stratagem of a feigned illness (this time dumbness) in order to induce her father to give up his project of marrying her to the hated Horace (his choice), and to gain time to carry out her own intentions with regard to the preferred Léandre. All the physicians as yet employed have proved vain, and Géronte despatches his two servants, Valère and Lucas, in search of "some one of those practitioners who are possessed of admirable secrets and particular remedies, who often perform cures that others have been unable to effect." Chance throws them, whilst on their search, in the way of a certain Martine, whose husband, Sganarelle, a wood-cutter, has just administered to her a conjugal lesson, enforced by the application of a cudgel, for which she would fain have her revenge.

When applied to by the two searchers after a performer of miracles, she thinks she sees her way to tasting the sweets of longed-for revenge; and pointing out her husband to them, cutting wood at some distance off, tells them that he is the very man for them, that he had already resuscitated a woman on the point of being buried, and a child of twelve years old who had broken its head, legs, and arms, in falling from the church steeple; "but," says she, "he always keeps his talents hidden, and will never confess that he is a doctor unless you each take a good stout cudgel and force him to own it." They hasten to secure their treasure, and, each selecting a good thick stick for himself, civilly accost the wood-cutter, who, supposing them to have come upon business, tells them that he is the first man in the world for making fagots, but that nothing will induce him to sell them at less than ten sous the hundred, "for," says he (and the expression has become proverbial), "there are fagots and fagots, you know." The two "doctor-seekers," anxious not to waste their time, request him to lay aside all these prevarications and to confess what his true occupation is; and finding him obdurate, proceed to apply the prescription recommended by Martine, which soon produces its effect. Sganarelle, after a few applications, exclaims, "Well, gentlemen, since you will have it so, I am a doctor, and apothecary into the bargain, if you like. I'd rather consent to be anything than get thrashed to death;" and he accompanies his two conductors to their master's house, where he makes his appearance in the gown and long-pointed hat of the "doctor of the period," and bids Géronte, who salutes him ceremoniously, to remain covered, as Hippocrates

recommends in his 'Chapter on Hats.' He is then introduced to his patient; and hearing that the malady with which she is afflicted is an inability to articulate, and that the husband whom her father has chosen for her is only waiting for her to be cured to claim her as his bride, "Who can the fool be," says Sganarelle, "who does not want his wife to be dumb? Would to heaven that my wife was afflicted with that malady! I'd take good care not to attempt to cure her."

The false doctor then plunges into pretended science, and hearing that Géronte does not understand Latin, launches forth into unmeaning jargon, mingled with a few high-sounding "medical" phrases, in which the brain, liver, heart, lungs, &c., are mixed up in an inextricable jumble.

"*Géronte.* But pardon me one remark. There was one part of your 'opinion' which rather puzzled me. It was with regard to the relative position of the liver and the heart. It seemed to me that you put them in different places to those they really occupy; and that the heart is on the left side and the liver on the *right.*

Sganarelle. That was all very well formerly; but we have changed all that, and we practise medicine now in quite a new fashion."

Nous avons changé tout cela, is one of the many sayings become proverbs, which the world, without always knowing it, owes to Molière.

Léandre (the favoured lover of Lucinde), seeing no other means of obtaining access to his mistress, bribes Sganarelle to introduce him into her presence under the disguise of an assistant apothecary; and believing him to be what he pretends to be, asks him to teach him four

or five medical expressions, so as to enable him to act up to his part. Whereupon Sganarelle discloses to him that he is no more a doctor than Léandre himself.

"No," says he, "they made me a doctor in spite of myself. . . . And you would hardly believe how widespread the mistake has become, and how every one is determined to think me a marvel of science. I am sought after on all sides; and if matters go on as they are now, I've a good mind to remain a doctor all my life. It is the best of trades; for whether you do well or ill you are paid all the same. Bad work never falls back on our shoulders, and we cut as we please into the stuff that is given us to work on. If a shoemaker, when making his shoes, spoils a piece of leather, he has to pay the expenses; but here you may 'spoil' a man and it does not cost you a halfpenny. The mistakes are never of *our* doing, and the fault is always with the patient who dies. Finally, the great advantage of this profession is that the dead are the most discreet and honest people in the world. They are never heard to complain of the doctor who has despatched them."

We need hardly quote more: true satire can scarcely go further.

The rest is soon told. The presence of Léandre, under the disguise of an apothecary, effects the cure in which all other physicians have failed; and so completely, that Lucinde, who but a minute before had been dumb, announces her intention of marrying none other than Léandre with such a voluble flow of words, that Géronte, in despair, appeals to Sganarelle to "make her dumb again." Léandre fortunately receives a letter in the nick of time, apprising him that his uncle is dead, and that he has now inherited all his money, and Géronte relents and consents to his union with Lucinde.

'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.'

The whole action of this amusing *comédie-ballet* consists in the devices employed by Julie and her lover Éraste, aided by Sbrigani and Nérine, who are briefly described in the list of characters as "intriguers" (a "profession" which would seem to have been one of some profit in those days), to counteract the intention of Julie's father, Oronte, to marry her to M. de Pourceaugnac, a country notable, whose arrival from Limoges is hourly expected, but whose chance of success we shall see to be but small when we hear Nérine's address to the young lady :—

"Can your father be serious to think of forcing you to marry this Limoges barrister, — this M. de Pourceaugnac, whom he has never seen in his life, and who is coming to carry you off under our very noses? Should three or four thousand crowns more suffice to make him reject a lover who is to your mind? and is a young lady like you to be thrown away on a Limosin? If he wants to marry, why does he not choose a Limoges lady, and leave Christians alone? We will play him so many tricks, and put such cheats upon him, that we will soon send him back to Limoges."

The tricks which are accordingly played off upon the poor gentleman are innumerable, and the most maddening of all consists in delivering him up as a madman into the charge of the doctors. Here is the character of the chief physician into whose hands he is delivered :—

"He is a man who knows his profession thoroughly, as I know my 'Belief,' and who, were his patient to die for it, would not depart one iota from the rules prescribed of old. Yes, he always follows the highroad, and never goes out of his way in search of novelties. For all the money in the

world he would not cure a patient with other remedies than those prescribed by the Faculty. . . . He is not one of those doctors who prolong their patients' complaints; he is an expeditious man, and one who despatches his 'cases' promptly; and if you have to die, he is the man to help you to do it quickly."

Such is the person in whose hands Éraste places M. de Pourceaugnac, and his torments are manifold. These, however, with some additional troubles not medical, attain at last the object desired; and the Limosin having been disposed of, Oronte consents to the marriage of his daughter with the husband of her own choice. Several of the commentators are of opinion that a certain M. Leonard de Loménie, who married Geneviève Béjart, and who came from Limoges, was aimed at in this amusing mystification. If so, there was little harm in the attack; for the simple, good provincial, notwithstanding all the ridicule poured upon him, is the only character in the play who attracts the reader's sympathies.

'Le Malade Imaginaire.'

Before analysing this, the last of our author's works, we should do well to consider that he was conscious of the fact that the malady to which he was subject was increasing, that his power was failing him, and his life rapidly ebbing; and he seems to have roused himself to a last bitter attack upon the art which had been so inefficacious to cure him. He survived the first representation of his play but a few days. It was first performed on the 10th February 1678, and Molière died on the evening of the 17th, soon after having himself acted the principal part. Auger tells us that, when he fell a victim

to his malady, many a fanatic member of the profession that he had ridiculed thought he saw in his death an exemplary vengeance for all these sarcasms. The chief personage in the piece, Argan,[1] a poor gentleman, who, although enjoying the best health, persuades himself that he is suffering from a complication of maladies, and who is confirmed in this belief by his doctors, has been left a widower with one daughter, Angélique, and has contracted a second marriage with a designing lady, by name Béline, whose only object is to see him gradually driven to his grave by the continued absorption of the drugs prescribed for him by his doctors, so that she may inherit his worldly goods. Angélique's heart is given to Cléante, but her father will not consent to their union, and has determined to give her to the son of one of the many practitioners who are employed in drugging the very life out of him; and the action of the play turns upon the ridiculous prescriptions of the doctors; the efforts of Argan's sensible brother, Béralde, to make him throw all the doctor's stuff to the dogs; and the various stratagems employed by Angélique and Cléante, assisted by the quick-witted Toinette, the most perfect type of the *soubrette* in any of Molière's plays, to obtain the accomplishment of this desire of their hearts. In the first scene Argan is discovered checking the accounts of his apothecary, M. Fleurant, and the wonder is that there is anything left of the poor man after all the drugs that we hear enumerated. He then bids Toinette summon his daughter Angélique to his presence, to whom he communicates his intention of giving her a husband; and the poor girl, who fondly imagines that

[1] The character was played by Molière himself.

the husband destined for her is no other than the Cléante of her own choice, is driven to despair when she hears that her father intends to bestow her hand upon Thomas Diafoirus, the son of one of his doctors. But if Angélique is made dumb with surprise, Toinette's tongue wags freely enough, and she speaks her mind pretty openly to her master, and asks him what possible reason he can have for insisting upon such a union.

"*Argan.* My reason is that, seeing how ill and infirm I am, I want to have a medical son-in-law, and procure myself allies amongst the doctors, so as to be supplied with a good store of resistance to my malady, and to have in my own family the source of all the necessary remedies, consultations, and prescriptions ready to hand."

We need not attempt to follow all the ridiculous scenes in which these quacks play on Argan's foolishness.

Against the efforts of the doctors all who really care for the hypochondriac make common cause, and one of the things suggested by his brother Béralde is to take Argan to see a play of Molière's on the subject.

"*Arg.* Your Molière is an impudent fellow with his plays; and I think he might show better taste than to put such honest folk as the doctors on the stage.

Bér. It is not the doctors that he holds up to ridicule, but the absurdities of the profession.

Arg. What business has he, I should like to know, to set himself up as a controller of the medical profession, . . . and to go and exhibit those venerable gentlemen on the stage?

Bér. What should he exhibit but the different professions that men exercise? We see every day princes and kings on the stage, who are quite as good as doctors any day.

Arg. No, indeed; I deny it *in toto*. If I were one of those

gentlemen, I would be revenged for his impertinence; and if he ever falls ill, I would let him die without the help of the profession. Whatever he might say or do, I would not order him the smallest blood-letting. I'd say to him, Die! die! that will teach you once for all to ridicule the Faculty."

The maid Toinette adopts a more efficacious treatment by disguising herself, according to Molière's favourite expedient, in the garb of a doctor, and prescribing entirely new medicines for her master; and at last brings him to his senses by a plan which she proposes in order to discover how much real affection Béline has for her husband. Toinette directs her master to stretch himself out as if dead in his easy-chair, though Argan says (and here we fancy we hear the real Molière speak), "*Is there no danger in counterfeiting death?*" and when Béline appears, Toinette tells her that he has just passed away in her arms.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaims the affectionate wife. "Now I am delivered of a great burden. What use was he when on earth? A man troublesome to all around him, —a dirty, disgusting creature, ever blowing his nose, coughing, or spitting. . . . You must help me, Toinette, to execute my plan. Since fortunately no one knows of his death, let us put him on his bed, and keep the fact concealed till I have done what I want. There are papers and money, which I must seize. . . . Come, Toinette, give me the keys."

The defunct man, however, starts to his feet, and the terror-stricken wife flies, never to reappear. The same stratagem being applied to test his daughter's affection, Angélique is plunged into real grief at the death of her father, and swears on her knees before the (supposed) corpse that she will comply with his last wishes, and

abandon her love for Cléante. The pretended dead man then comes to life, and this time consents to his daughter marrying Cléante, provided he will consent to turn doctor. M. Béralde persuades him that he would do better to be received into the medical profession himself, and tells him that a "Faculty" with which he was well acquainted has consented to perform the ceremony, then and there, in Argan's own house. Argan willingly consents, and the play concludes with a mock ceremony in dog-Latin exactly copied from that generally observed on the admission of a new doctor, in the midst of which, as has been already remarked, Molière's own death-agony began.

Having thus reviewed the group of plays which are founded upon this *motif*, we return briefly to the other dramas interspersed among them, beginning with a comedy which appeared in 1668, the year which produced the 'Avare,' but which does not call for detailed examination or analysis. 'Georges Dandin' is one of those returns made by Molière in his later days to his former work, of which we have spoken. It is the story of the 'Jalousie du Barbouillé'—a sketch which the mature judgment of the advancing artist must have seen to be full of suggestion and possibility—which is worked out in this more elaborate composition. Georges Dandin is a rich peasant, who has married the daughter of a decayed noble, and who is held in the greatest contempt and kept at arm's length by M. de Sotenville and his wife, an old pair of faded gentlefolks, in all the ridicule and meanness of pretence and poverty, with nothing really noble in them; for their perpetual allusions to the glory of the De Sotenvilles on one side, and the house of La Prudoterie on the other, are not redeemed by the

smallest lingering of hereditary grace. Georges Dandin meets this arrogant old couple when he is in all the heat of righteous indignation, having just had a love-message for his wife confided to him by the rustic bearer who has carried it. The father-in-law and mother-in-law interrupt the angry husband at every word. *She* will not allow herself to be called *belle-mère*, but only Madame; *he* will not have his name used at every turn, and requests the unfortunate Georges to remember "that it is not respectful to call people by their name, and to those of superior rank it is becoming to say Monsieur only;" in this way they object to almost every word he says. The lover, Clitandre, then suddenly appears on the stage, and, after a pompous self-introduction on the part of M. de Sotenville, who announces himself as bearing "a name well known at Court," is asked whether it is true that he has been making love to Angélique. "Who? I?" cries Clitandre. "I capable of making love to a young and beautiful person who has the honour to be the daughter of M. de Sotenville!" Angélique, coming in, indignantly supports this denial. "I should like to see you make love to me," she says. "Only try, I beg of you; you will find your answer." The maid who has received the message is equally indignant, and the end is, that poor Georges Dandin, the injured husband, though entirely unconvinced, is compelled to ask pardon all round, and to make the most humble apologies, dictated by the ridiculous old aristocrat, to the offender. When he discovers, in the next act, that the lover has actually made good an entrance into his house—even when he meets him in the act of leaving it, the unfortunate husband fares no better

than before; for Angélique, the moment she perceives him approaching with her father and mother, begins to scold the lover with every appearance of indignation, ending by beating him with a stick—a forcible evidence of anger—the blows, however, falling upon Dandin, and not upon Clitandre. "What a wife you have got!" cry the spectators. "Why don't you thank her for the affection she shows you?" and they recommend him to "try to appease her," and to "make peace" by "a few caresses," when she goes off after this scene with a pretence of displeasure.

The third act repeats almost exactly the chief scene of the 'Barbouillé.' Angélique, going out into the garden when she supposes her husband asleep, to meet her lover, is seen by Dandin, and finds, on returning, the door locked against her. The husband and wife then hold a colloquy, he at the window, she outside the door. Finding no other means of moving him, she declares herself ready to avow everything, and never again to give him any cause of offence, if he will but open to her; and at last, making a pretence of despair, declares that she has a knife, and will kill herself if he remains obdurate. "Ah, it is done!" she cries. "Heaven grant that my death may be avenged as I wish, and that he who is the cause of it may be punished for his hardness to me!" Poor Dandin, at the window, is filled with alarm at this. "Can she have been so spiteful as to kill herself in order to hang me?" he cries, coming down with his candle, and rushing out into the darkness to see what has happened. Needless to say that the wicked wife and her attendant steal in and shut the door upon him in turn, and that her father and mother,

whom he has sent for, arrive just in time to see him half dressed outside his door, and she at the window, indignantly asking if this is the manner of life which becomes a good husband, and declaring her intention to complain to her father and mother. The end is, that Dandin, none of whose explanations are listened to, is again obliged to beg pardon, this time on his knees, and to promise better behaviour for the future. "Go back to your house, and see if you cannot behave yourself," says the officious old father-in-law, who has again dictated, word by word, his recantation. "The best thing I can do," cries the unfortunate, "is to throw myself into the sea, head foremost." And thus, in the complete shame and subjection of the peasant-husband, the story ends.

It is interesting to trace the progress of mind and art which made out of the bare framework of the 'Barbouillé' this painful and bitter sketch of living manners and social wrongs and difficulties. Character of any kind had no existence in the original sketch, while here the helpless, suspicious, cowardly husband, and the old father and mother, are all distinct and living persons, full of individuality and meaning. We have already said that Molière seldom assailed the arrogance of stupid aristocracy, though it was one of the evils of his time from which he suffered most. Here, however, is one example, equally ludicrous and triumphant. M. de Sotenville and his old wife have none of the grace with which it is easy to make even the imbecility of rank pardonable. They are a couple of rustics, as ridiculous as Madame d'Escarbagnas, with no real superiority either in mind or manners. The force of ineradicable preju-

dice which gives them such a mastery over the son-in-law who has enriched them, and which deprives the rich peasant, fully conscious of the power of his money, and quite undeceived by their pretences, of all power to hold his own against them, is set forth with the greatest reality and truth. It could not fail to be a disagreeable picture, but it is a powerful one.

After these developments of early ideas, Molière's next effort was in a new and brilliant vein: having set so many familiar figures of butterfly courtiers, fashionable beaux, worldly-minded rich men, and penurious nobles before his countrymen, he suddenly convulsed them with laughter before the ridiculous portrait of a genuine and simple *parvenu* — the shopkeeper prince and vulgar millionaire in his heartiest and most genial development. The simple complacency yet honest humbleness of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* has made him a chief favourite with all Molière's hearers and readers from the beginning of his delightful history. The folly that is so cordial, so natural,—the transparency of all the ridiculous vanities in which he is enveloped—and the delight with which his foolish countenance shines as he finds himself acquiring knowledge and fine clothes and beautiful manners,—are altogether so genuine and ingratiating as to carry us through all the absurd impossibilities of the plot, which verge upon the region of mere farce, without any abatement of our pleasure. No imposition, we feel, could be too gross for M. Jourdain, and we are willing to adopt any expedient which will keep him before us in all his bewilderments and enchantments—so foolish, so laughable, so beaming, so good-humouredly true.

The plot or framework upon which this inimitable piece of fun is built may be briefly described. M. Jourdain, an enriched retired tradesman, finding that all his wealth can procure gives but little compensation for the disadvantages to which his low birth and extraction expose him, determines to make up in mature age for what has been neglected in his youth, and to educate himself up to the level of his better-born neighbours. For this purpose he "goes to school" for the first time in his life, and surrounds himself with professors of music, dancing, fencing, philosophy, &c., much to the disgust of his honest, plain-spoken wife, who has no ideas beyond those of her station in life—and of their servant, Nicole, who still holds her own in her own department, spite of the magnificent lackeys who wait upon her master, and who grumbles loudly at the extra amount of cleaning-up entailed upon her by the often-repeated visits of the professors. As old Jourdain's chief ambition is to be admitted into the society of the upper class, he has allowed himself to be duped by a somewhat needy and utterly unscrupulous nobleman, who, as his wife tells him, makes a milch-cow of him; and by the flattering assurance that he has spoken of him (M. Jourdain) that very morning in the king's antechamber, draws sum after sum of money out of the old fool's pockets—under promise of repayment, it is true, but with little hope of the promise being ever carried into effect. He even carries his cajolery of M. Jourdain so far as to make use of his house to carry on an intrigue with a certain Marquise Dorimène; and the simple *bourgeois*, convinced, upon Dorante's assurance, that this grand lady views his own attentions with no unfavourable eye, lavishes pres-

ents upon her (of course through the medium of Dorante, who obtains all the credit of them for himself), and at last entertains her with a magnificent banquet, which is unpleasantly interrupted by the sudden appearance of his wife and the irrepressible Nicole.

The love-plot, without which no play of Molière's would be complete, is in this case merely accessory, and is only so far necessary to the general action that it serves to introduce the incident which displays our *bourgeois* in his most ridiculous light. Cléonte, a worthy young man, and in every way a suitable match for Lucile, and as such accepted by Mme. Jourdain, is rejected by M. Jourdain on the plea that he is not of noble extraction; whereupon he contrives, in concert with his valet Covielle, a plan, the extravagance of which would be beneath the domain of high comedy but for the perfection of amusing folly in the principal character. Covielle, disguised as an emissary from the son of the Grand Seigneur, who, says he, happens to be at that time in Paris, tells M. Jourdain that his Highness has conceived an attachment for his daughter Lucile—that he is anxious to contract a matrimonial alliance with her—and that in order to raise M. Jourdain to a rank suitable for such a distinction, he, the Grand Turk's son, has decided upon making him a "Mamamouchi,' a grand dignitary of the country. M. Jourdain is overjoyed at the prospect, and sees but one objection to the realisation of this grand project, which is, that his daughter is unfortunately attached to a certain Cléonte, and that she has sworn to wed no other. Covielle removes these objections by assuring him that, strange to say, the son of the Grand Turk is the very image of this Cléonte. Where-

upon Cléonte presents himself disguised as a Turk, and accompanied by a band of mummers, dressed as dervishes, preceded by the grand Muphti himself; and M. Jourdain is duly invested with the dignity of Mamamouchi, and a costume suitable to his rank. Mme. Jourdain appearing on the scene, is at first disgusted by this new crowning absurdity of her husband's; but upon being let into the secret by Covielle, consents to the union of her daughter with the fictitious heir to the dominions of the Grand Seigneur; and Dorante, having to some advantage applied the *bourgeois'* wealth and lavish extravagance to gain his own ends, obtains the object of his desires in the hand of the Marquise Dorimène.

Such is the outline of this amusing play, which, although its fun may occasionally overstep the limits of true comedy and lapse into burlesque, furnishes a number of comical situations unsurpassed in any other of our author's works, and is full of expressions which have become proverbial.

When the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' was first represented before the king and his Court at Chambord on the 13th October 1670, the king gave no sign of satisfaction, and said nothing about the play afterwards at supper to Molière. This being construed into evidence that he was not pleased with it, the Court, always ready to take their cue from their sovereign lord and master, abused the play and the writer heartily. "What does Molière take us for," said one, "to think to amuse us with such absurdities?" Another, "What does he mean with his 'Halaba, balashoa'?"—quoting some of the Turkish gibberish of the play. However, when the second perform-

ance took place a few days after the first, the king told Molière that he had never written anything which had amused him so much, and that his play was excellent. This, of course, established its reputation, and the same courtiers who had blamed it before were now as ready to praise it. The idea of the mock Turkish ceremony was suggested by the coincidence of the presence of a Turkish embassy at that time in Paris; and it is said that the Chevalier d'Arvieux, who had spent some twelve years in the East, and who was consequently conversant with the manners, language, and costume of the Turks, was instructed by the king to assist Molière and Lulli in composing a play in which they should be introduced. Lulli not only composed the music, but himself played the part of the Grand Muphti.

Our space will not permit us to follow M. Jourdain through his studies, or to show the perplexity with which he stands amid his professors while each vaunts his art—the dancing-master, the fencer, and the musician each asserting his superiority: till they come to blows, and the philosopher, who enters last, drives all the others away, and remains in possession. This latter authority teaches his delighted pupil how he must open his mouth to pronounce the vowels, and informs him, to his great rapture, that when he asks his maid for his slippers he is speaking prose. This piece of information he communicates in his turn to his wife, who does not admire it so much. "Do you know what you are talking at the present moment?" he asks.

"*Madame Jourdain.* I know that what I am talking is good sense, and that you ought to change your manner of living.

M. J. I don't mean that. I mean, do you know *what* the words are that you are now saying?

Mme. J. They are sensible words, and that's more than I can say of your conduct.

M. J. I don't mean that. I ask you, what I am now saying to you at this present moment, what is it?

Mme. J. Stuff and nonsense.

M. J. It's *prose*, you ignorant woman!

Mme. J. Prose?

M. J. Yes, *prose*. All that is prose is not verse, and all that is not verse is prose. There! That's what one learns by study."

It is impossible, however, to do anything like justice in translation to these dialogues; and we are obliged to abandon the attempt—with the less reluctance in the present case, as the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme' is perhaps of all Molière's plays the one best known. The concluding ceremonies by which M. Jourdain is made a Mamamouchi are pure farce; and his longing after nobility is humoured with the broadest simplicity. The emissary who brings him news of the rank about to be conferred upon him, announces himself as having been a great friend of M. Jourdain's late father.

"*M. Jourdain.* Of my father?

Covielle. Yes; he was a most distinguished nobleman.

M. J. My father!

Cov. Yes.

M. J. Did you know him well?

Cov. Certainly.

M. J. And you knew him to be a nobleman?

Cov. Certainly.

M. J. I don't know what the world is made of, then.

Cov. Why?

M. J. There are some foolish people who will insist on it that he was a tradesman.

Cov. He a tradesman! It is pure slander; he never was any such thing. The fact was, that he was very obliging, and ready to do a service; and as he was a very good judge of cloth goods, he used to go about in all directions choosing them, had them brought to his house, and gave them to his friends in return for money.

M. J. I am delighted to have made your acquaintance, so that you may bear witness to the fact that my father was a nobleman.

Cov. I will maintain it before all the world."

This is one, again, of the many numorous sayings which we are all in the habit, sometimes without knowing it, of borrowing from Molière.

The 'Comtesse d'Escarbagnas,' which we have ventured to instance as in some respects a *pendant* to the wonderful history of M. Jourdain, is less simple, and at the same time less complete, than the greater study. The Countess is a great lady from the country, who has learned on her visit to Paris to ape the manners not only of a class superior to her own provincial rank, but of the *Précieuses* themselves, who were the flower of intellectual elevation, fine language, and fine manners, as well as of aristocratic splendour. She does not begin from the beginning, like our delightful citizen, nor does she surround herself with instructors, at whom to gaze open-mouthed, but displays, in her already acquired airs, a model of all the perfections that are to be learned at Court, in contrast with the modest and simple but slightly satirical Julie, who is a real great lady, and the true object of the devotion of the Vicomte, whom Madame d'Escarbagnas believes to be her lover, without, however, giving up the humble admirers who swell her court and send her presents. "These are people whom

one humours in the country in case one might require to make use of them. They serve at the least to fill up vacant places, and to add to the number of aspirants for one's favour; for it does not answer," she says prudently, "to leave one lover master of the field, lest his love should go to sleep through too much confidence, and for want of rivalry." The rivals whom she keeps in play, to secure the Vicomte, are M. Tibaudier the counsellor, and M. Harpin the receiver of taxes. The former is as flowing in his diction as any *Précieuse* could desire. "Madame," he writes, in sending her a basket of pears, "I could not have sent you this present had I not gathered more fruit of my garden than I do of my love." He is sure that his pears, if not quite ripe, are at least less hard than her heart, and considers himself to show very Christian sentiments in sending her the pears called "bon-Chrétiens," in place of the "Poires d'angoisse," which her cruelty forces upon him. When the Vicomte and Julie read this letter, with much polite jeering at its fine style, the Countess takes the defence of her admirer. "There is perhaps a word or two that is not of the Academy," she says, "but I see a certain respectfulness in it which pleases me;" and she lends a not unwilling ear to the "strophes," in tender reproach of "a person of quality," which her rustic lover brings to read to the company, as in the famous society of the *Précieuses*. To this ineffable pair of rustics, whom the lovers of high life make use of and laugh at, enters M. Harpin, the collector of taxes, in a very different mood. He has heard that the Vicomte is making love to the Countess, and comes in, in a furious rage, to upbraid her with her infidelity, and to declare his in-

tention no longer to "pay for the fiddlers while others dance." Nothing will appease this infuriated *parvenu*, who flings out of the house, abandoning his faithless Countess, who had by no means intended any such breach. Immediately on his withdrawal a message comes to the Vicomte, announcing that all obstacles to his marriage with Julie are now removed—a blow which falls still more heavily upon the astonished Countess, who has known nothing of their secret understanding. "What!" she cries once more, as she had done when M. Harpin withdrew,—"treat a person of my quality like this!" "If you will take my advice, Madame," says the Vicomte, "to complete the comedy, you will marry M. Tibaudier." Seeing herself thus abandoned on all sides, the would-be fine lady comes to her senses. "Yes, M. Tibaudier," she cries, "I will marry you—to spite the whole world." Thus the little comedy ends. There is a great deal of amusing dialogue with the country servants, whom the Countess endeavours to train into language as fine as her own, for which we have not room, and which recalls to some extent the lessons given by Madelon and Cathos in the 'Précieuses' to their rustic page and maid-servant.

The 'Fourberies de Scapin' is another play in which the traditions of the old inspiration, which was so much more superficial than the teachings of Molière's maturer genius, may be again found, without even the widened meaning and real life which transform the episodical farce of the 'Barbouillé' into the cowardice and discomfiture of 'Georges Dandin.' Scapin is another version of the Mascarille of the 'Étourdi,' in no way superior to that cleverest of anachronisms. He is the

slave of the classic comic drama resuscitated, the rogue of infinite countenance, the *fourbe* or theatrical rascal, proud of his own lies and devices. The story is somewhat complicated, which is again a characteristic of many of Molière's early plays. We are first introduced to two young gallants, Octave and Léandre, who have both fallen in love imprudently: one with a poor orphan whom he has first seen in a state of utter abandonment, weeping over her dead mother, and whose name is Hyacinthe; while the other has pledged his affections to an equally unsuitable person, a young gipsy called Zerbinette, as all the world supposes. That it should turn out that these two heroines were precisely the young persons whom it was expedient for Octave and Léandre to marry will not surprise the reader; but in the meantime Octave has been plunged into the greatest alarm by hearing that his father, Argante, is on the point of returning from a long absence, with the intention of instantly finding a wife for his son, who has, alas! already sealed his own fate by privately marrying his Hyacinthe. Scapin, who is the valet-tutor of his friend Léandre, hearing of the young man's trouble, undertakes, in the most light-hearted way, to see him through it. "To tell the truth, few things are impossible to me when I take it in hand to interfere," he says. "I have certainly received from heaven a fine genius for all these happy expedients of wit, these ingenious gallantries to which the vulgar give the name of trickery; and I may say without vanity, that no man has ever been seen, more clever than I in managing all the springs of intrigue, or who has gained more glory in that noble trade." One thing which is very necessary is to procure money, which

Scapin pledges himself to do from the fathers of the young men. Accordingly, he goes to Géronte, the father of Léandre, with a very long face and miserable aspect, and tells him how his son has made acquaintance with a young Turk, who invited him on board his galley, served him with a delicious collation and fine wines, but ended by carrying him off to sea, sending a message by Scapin to the effect that if five hundred crowns were not sent immediately, the young man would be taken as a slave to Algiers. Géronte is so startled by this sudden conclusion that he can do nothing at first but repeat, "What the devil had he to do in the galley?" (*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*)—a phrase which has become proverbial, and is more universally quoted, perhaps, than any other in the language. Through all Scapin's arguments, and through the perplexed father's own attempts to think what is best to be done, breaks in over and over again the same exclamation, so perfectly true to nature. Géronte bids Scapin go and threaten the Turk with the law; then orders the valet to substitute himself for his master; then begins to see the necessity of thinking of the ransom—but in his distress and bewilderment returns constantly to his first cry, "What the devil had he to do in the galley at all? What did he want there?" At last, after a most amusing scene, Scapin gets the money, and hastens off to the relief of his young master. Then ensues a famous and most comical scene, which, however, plays better than it reads. Scapin, for no particular reason that appears, unless it be to avenge himself for a beating which has been given him, plays off a new and wicked trickery upon Géronte, his master's father, making him believe that the ima-

ginary brother of Octave's wife, who has already frightened Argante to death, is now looking for him (Géronte), with the intention of killing him. "All his friends, bullies like himself, are looking for you on every side," says the rogue; and the only thing that he can suggest is that Géronte should get into a sack, which he (Scapin) will carry to his house, thus escaping the watch that is being kept. Géronte creeps into the sack trembling, and the rascal plays an entire scene by himself, imitating the voices, one after another, of a crowd of imaginary bravos, who come to him demanding Géronte, and are supposed to beat him (the blows all falling upon the poor master trembling in the sack) because he will not betray his master. The first is a Gascon; the second a German; then come a number, "half-a-dozen soldiers all together," he cries in his own voice to Géronte. This over-doing of the part awakens Géronte's suspicions, who peeps out of the sack and sees at once the trick that has been played upon him. A lively actor—and Scapin was one of the parts which Molière himself played—can make this scene, which is pure farce, extremely amusing; but it is not of a very elevated kind of humour, as the reader will perceive.

After this audacious trick is discovered the trickster is played out, and all the imbroglios get cleared up in Molière's ordinary way. When all is happily arranged, Scapin, against whom Géronte is naturally enraged, reappears, supported by two men, and with every appearance of being seriously wounded. "I could not die without begging pardon of all the people I have offended," he says—and especially of his old master, for the beating which Géronte, in the midst of all that fine

company, by no means wants to hear any more about. "I forgive you everything—on condition that you die," he says, on perceiving signs of recovery in the cunning villain. The play ends as the earliest of all the *canevas* ended. "Let us go and sup together and enjoy our happiness," says Argante; while Scapin adds, "Let them carry me to the end of the table—till I die."

The only play that now remains to be noticed is the 'Femmes Savantes,' another instance of a repeated idea. So far as invention and construction go, Molière had been for some time helping himself by the crutches of the past, groping among the old treasures of his theatrical store. Now it was the first of his genuine personal successes, the earliest manifestation of his real genius, which he was tempted to extend and fill out. The 'Femmes Savantes' is put on a larger canvas than the 'Précieuses Ridicules.' It is a more carefully constructed story, with an orthodox plot and object, not an episode like the other; and the satire in it is graver and of more distinct meaning, with a conscious moral, which, notwithstanding the punishment of the poor young *Précieuses* in the earlier study, had no existence in the delightful record of their foolishness. The *Femmes Savantes* have nothing delightful about them, and are held up to our dislike, never permitted to interest us like the rustic *demoiselles;* while we have the legitimate interest of a pretty young pair of lovers to engage our good wishes, whose happiness can only be secured by crushing the blue-stockings and rendering them powerless. These circumstances change the character of the play; but the just thinking and correct phraseology of the lover Clitandre does not make up to us for the absence

of the enchanting Mascarille, who is so much superior in his foppishness to all the real fops, and in his intellectualism to all the true poetasters of the *salons*. The 'Femmes Savantes' was produced in 1672, within a few months of Molière's death.

The plot of the play is as follows: Chrysale, described as a *bon bourgeois*, a simple-minded, plain-spoken, matter-of-fact gentleman, is blessed with a wife, Philaminte, whose character is the very opposite of his own—an imperious, self-willed *bel esprit*, wishing to rule despotically in her household, and to be the founder and queen of a learned "circle," whose regulations, statutes, and laws shall be of her own framing; and as though this were not enough to drive the poor man distracted, he is further "blessed" with a sister, who follows humbly in Philaminte's steps, and is, moreover, possessed with a hallucination that all the world is in love with her. These two, in conjunction with Armande, Chrysale's daughter, who joins to the pedantism of her mother and aunt a jealous and vindictive temper, are the *Femmes Savantes* who give the title to the play. Poor Chrysale, who is in deadly fear of his wife, though in her absence he affects to be master in his own house, is anxious to marry his daughter Henriette (who by her good sense and sweet disposition forms a pleasing contrast to her sister Armande) to Clitandre, a more favourable specimen of the young nobleman of the day than many others that Molière has given us. But Philaminte has another match in view in the person of Trissotin, a fashionable rhymester—a *poète des ruelles*, as they were then called—a pedant after her own heart—a self-satisfied and self-seeking suitor, whose only object in

aspiring to the hand of Henriette is to obtain her fortune, and who, together with a certain Vadius, another poor scribbler, drawing largely from the sources of the ancient Greek and Latin authors, hold such an important place in the play, that, as has been suggested by M. Auger, they might have furnished its title as 'Trissotin, or the Ridiculous Authors.' Chrysale and his sensible daughter Henriette, would have but little chance of success against such a formidable hostile array but for a certain honest[1] brother, Ariste by name, who backs him up in his resistance to his imperious wife, when he sees him wavering, and who encourages Clitandre when inclined to despair of conquering the opposition with which his suit is met by the three *Femmes Savantes*. Trissotin's own cupidity is in the end the cause of his discomfiture; and Henriette obtains the husband of her heart, instead of being sacrificed, as we have more than once reason to fear she will be, to the miserable rhymester, whose only reason for courting her is to obtain her dowry. There seems to be little reason to doubt that Molière, in creating the characters of Trissotin and Vadius, had in his eye the Abbé Cotin and Ménage. As to the former there can be hardly any hesitation. Molière is even said to have wished at first to give his poet the name of Tricotin, but to have allowed himself to be persuaded to change it to Trissotin. The Abbé Cotin, born in 1604, was a member of the French Academy. He was a prolific composer of *rondeaux*, madrigals, and enigmas, and assumed to himself the title of "Father of French Enigma." The sonnet and madrigal quoted in

[1] Cf. the part of Ariste in 'L'École des Maris,' Cléante in 'Tartuffe,' and Béralde in the 'Malade Imaginaire.'

the play are literally extracted from the 'Œuvres Galantes' of the Abbé Cotin, published in 1663.

The follies of the blue-stockings are pursued without mercy through scene after scene. A poor servant-girl comes in bathed in tears, and tells her master that her mistress has given her warning to leave immediately. Chrysale, who has a liking for the girl, bids her remain; but Philaminte rushes in accompanied by Bélise, and insists upon Martine packing off without delay. Chrysale in vain endeavours to learn the cause of the poor girl's disgrace, and asks whether she has broken anything valuable, glass, china, &c., or committed any theft. "Worse than all that," says Philaminte:—

"*Philaminte.* She has, with insolence beyond compare,
Spite of the lessons we have given her,
Tortured our ears with low and vulgar words,
Condemned by Vaugelas[1] in express terms.
Chrysale. Is that——?
Phil. What! Shall she ever, spite of all remonstrance,
Insult the very fountain of all science,
Grammar! whose sceptre even kings obey,
Bending obedient to her smallest law!
Chrys. I thought her guilty of some misdemeanour.
Phil. What! could you pardon such a crime as that?
Chrys. Heaven forbid!
Phil. Excuse her, if you dare!
Chrys. I've no intention——
Bél. Truly it is pitiful.
Every construction is neglected by her,
Though taught a hundred times the laws of language."

[1] Vaugelas, the greatest authority on French grammar, author of 'Remarques sur la langue Française,' died in 1650.

Next Bélise's special folly is displayed. When she overhears the appeal which Ariste makes to Chrysale on behalf of Clitandre, she informs her brothers that they are mistaken,—that it is not to the hand of Henriette but to her own that Clitandre aspires; and upon their expressing their doubts as to the probability of such a fact, details a list of other unfortunate lovers who are also sighing in vain for her, such as Dorante Damis, Cléante, and Lycidas.

"*Ariste.* What! *all* in love with you?
Bélise. Yes, brother, *all.*
Ar. Have they declared their love?
Bél. They durst not, brother.
Their veneration for me has been such
That the word 'love' has not yet passed their mouths;
But that their hearts and service are all mine,
Their eyes have shown with dumb interpretation.
Ar. Yet Damis hardly ever comes to see you.
Bél. That shows but more respect, greater submission.
Ar. Dorante's abuse of you is never ceasing.
Bél. His jealous fury finds no other vent.
Ar. Cléante and Lycidas are married both.
Bel. Despair has driven them to such a course.
Ar. Dear sister, you indulge in empty visions.
Chrysale. Of such chimæras you should rid yourself.
Bél. Chimæras! ah! chimæras did you say?
Chimæras! I! chimæras! Well, that's good!
Thanks for the word 'chimæras,' brother mine.
I really did not know I had 'chimæras.'"

The great scene, however, of this play, is that which introduces the rhymester Trissotin, and in which he declaims his ridiculous sonnet and epigram to the ravished ears of the three *Savantes.* The sonnet is

copied word for word from a production of the Abbé Cotin, addressed to the Duchesse de Nemours:—

"Your prudence sure must sleep,
To treat so splendidly
Your cruellest enemy,
And so superbly keep.
From your rich rooms, whate'er they say (*quoi qu'on die*)—
Bid her at once begone,
Or that ungrateful one
May snatch your lovely life away."

Here the enthusiasm of the ladies bursts forth. The *quoi qu'on die* is too much for them. Their ecstasy knows no bounds, and Philaminte goes so far as to say to Trissotin—

"But when you wrote that charming *quoi qu'on die*
Did you, yourself, its vigour comprehend?
Were you aware yourself of all it means?
Could you *intend* the wit these words contain?"

The poet complacently receives the homage lavished upon him, and continues his sonnet, in which, however, it is unnecessary for us to follow him.

This highly edifying conference is interrupted by the arrival of the *savant* Vadius, whom Trissotin presents to the ladies as a marvel of science.

"*Trissotin.* This gentleman I here present you, ladies,
Has long and ardently desired this honour;
From him you need fear no profanity,
For all fine wits acknowledge him their equal;
He knows his classic authors all by heart—
No man in all France is a better Grecian.

Philaminte. Greek! Sister, hear, the gentleman knows Greek!

Bélise (*to Armande*). Niece! do you hear?—Greek!

Armande. Greek! oh how delicious!

Phil. What! really, sir, do you know Greek indeed? Let me embrace you for the love of Greek.

(*Vadius embraces ceremoniously the three Savantes, and turns to Henriette to do the same.*)

Henriette. Your pardon, sir, but I do *not* know Greek."

The *bel esprit* and the *savant* then proceed to extol each other's productions, till, unfortunately, Trissotin, happening to ask Vadius whether he has heard the famous sonnet on the "Princess Uranie's quartan ague," the *savant*, not aware that he is speaking to the composer of the sonnet, abuses it unmercifully; and on finding out who really was the author, makes a lame excuse, on the plea that it must have been badly read to him, and claims attention for a ballad of his own composition. It is now Trissotin's turn to abuse ballads in general, saying that they can have charms for none but pedants; whereupon the two gentlemen begin to belabour each other with the most violent recrimination of which their respective vocabularies are capable, and Vadius flounces out with a threat of demolishing Trissotin with his pen.

The happy termination of the play is brought about by a pious fraud on the part of Ariste, who makes Trissotin believe that Henriette has lost her fortune, a calamity which quickly decides the poet to have nothing more to say to her. And thus the blue-stockings are discomfited, and good sense and virtue made happy.

'Les Femmes Savantes' was followed, as has been already recorded, by the 'Malade Imaginaire,' the last of

Molière's productions, which, as belonging to a special class of his plays, has been already described. Here his manifold labours came to an end, concluding, like those of so many other great writers, while his mind was still in its full vigour, and none of his intellectual faculties impaired.

END OF MOLIÈRE.

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